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THE LONG LANE'S TURNING

HALLIE ERMINIE
RIVES



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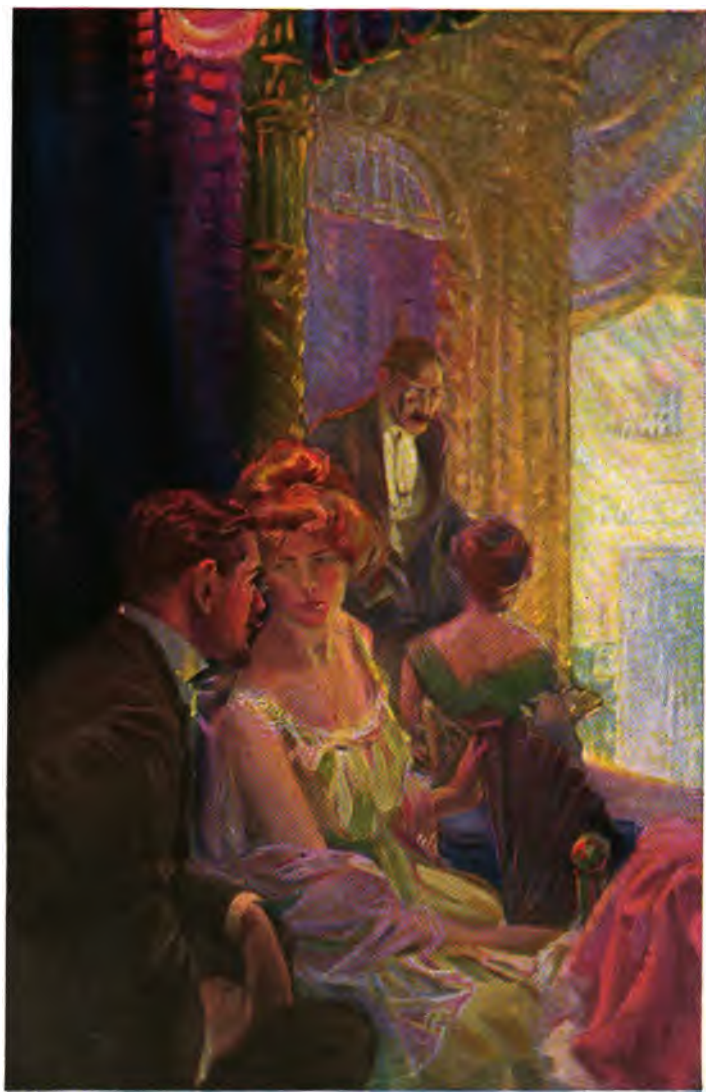
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THE LONG LANE'S TURNING

BOOKS BY
HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES
(MRS. POST WHEELER)

THE LONG LANE'S TURNING
THE VALIANTS OF VIRGINIA
THE KINGDOM OF SLENDER SWORDS
SATAN SANDERSON
THE CASTAWAY
HEARTS COURAGEOUS
A FURNACE OF EARTH

TALES FROM DICKENS



Her lips trembled, but she spoke in a clear undertone, audible only to him, which faltered the merest trifle (Page 316.)

THE LONG LANE'S TURNING

BY

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

(MRS. POST WHEELER)

Author of "Satan Sanderson" "Hearts Courageous,"
"The Valiants of Virginia," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FRANCES ROGERS



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1917

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as "The Heart of a Man"

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Her lips trembled, but she spoke in a clear undertone, audible only to him, which faltered the merest trifle. (Page 316) . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
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"I have answered you," she replied, "once and for all. You will please consider it final"	62
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THE LONG LANE'S TURNING

CHAPTER I

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE

THE dark was falling over the court-room. A lurid ray of the setting sun gleamed redly on the dust-streaked window panes, and struggled disconsolately with the melancholy gleam of the oil lamps that an awkward attendant with creaking foot-leather had laboriously lighted in their wall-brackets. Their pale radiance gleamed on the painted faces of dead jurists that looked down from fly-specked canvases on the walls and was reflected from the mass of moving, living faces that filled the room, whose eyes gazed alternately at the Judge's vacant seat, and at the empty railed space that had peened in the restless jury now considering their verdict in an upper room — to return again and again to the spot where sat the man over whose dingy case a medley of voices had declaimed and wrangled throughout that southern spring day.

He sat slouched in his chair, his narrow, faded-blue eyes, strained and frightened, fixed on the

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empty jury-box, his uncertain hand lifting from time to time to give a swift, furtive touch to his collar or a thrust to his wiry, sand-coloured hair. In the pallid lamp-light the hard sneer that had curved his lips during the dragging trial had faded and his face seemed all at once piteous and younger.

To a stranger there would have seemed little in the circumstances to inspire the popular interest the full room betokened. The accused was a rough sawyer, known to his fellows of the logging camp as "Paddy the Brick," with a history of sluggishness and inebriety behind him. The crime of which he stood charged was the theft of a comrade's earnings, the story merely one of those sordid dramas of menial life which were so familiar. The evidence, though purely circumstantial, was, to a casual eye, sufficiently conclusive.

Yet in the minds of most of those who had filled the dingy court room during the two days just passed, there had been until the last hour a general expectation that the man would be cleared. This had been based upon nothing save the common knowledge that his counsel was Harry Sevier.

The latter had never failed to justify the expectations that had habitually heralded his doings. Young, likable, perfectly equipped and knowing his southern world, he had returned, after a half dozen years of foreign schooling, to step into a social niche readily accorded him by those who had seen little of him since boyhood. His grey eyes and

crisp, dark beard, had been distinguishing marks of forebears whose lives had been lived in that neighbourhood and who had left their vivid impress upon the institutions of their time; statesmen, diplomats and soldiers had been of that line, and he himself, with his characteristic mannerisms, his unimpeachable grooming, his nice observance of the social code, had come to be regarded as the perfect pattern of his type. Left an orphan at an early age, he had inherited a comfortable property and the income of a city block, and he spent the money judiciously, if lavishly. His Panhard was the swiftest car in town, as his offices were the most sumptuous, though ostentatiously simple in appointment. He had a Japanese valet, and the "at homes" which he occasionally gave in his bachelor apartment, though they might be dominated "pink teas" by the envious unbidden, were affairs to which an *entrée* was a hallmark. He maintained also a shooting-box on an upper slope of the Blue Ridge — a comfortable bungalow set in a hundred acres of wilderness — whither of autumns he and a dozen other choice spirits were wont to fare for a fortnight's tramping and fishing, sleeping on pungent hemlock boughs and eating homely food cooked by the single negro servant who lived there as caretaker. He had a gift for private theatricals — he was in constant demand of the Amateur Dramatic Club — and had more than a *dilettante* appreciation of music and art.

As regards his profession, he had injected into the somewhat cut-and-dried legal life of the old Capital an unusual and winning element of personality and a method at variance with established usage. His very eccentricities had set him apart from the mass, who were so glamoured with the sordid things of life; and the apparent contempt for material reward with which he defended poor and unknown clients as readily as rich and influential ones had its appeal to a class which possessed imagination and ideals. There had seldom been a case in which he had not successfully employed a curious subterranean logic — an apparently wilful insistence upon what seemed at first glance the unvital and immaterial — as a preliminary to a swift *volte-face* by which he turned the evidence at a new and unexpected angle of inference, and drove home the doubt with a brilliant display of oratory which captivated and — for the moment — convinced. In the four years in which he had stamped his individuality upon the town, not only had he never lost a criminal case, but he had created a certain conviction that a trial in which he figured would offer unmistakable elements of surprise and entertainment. So that the Criminal Court had come, in a way, to be the fashion, and the sombre chambers of justice saw many an assemblage that would have graced another sort of gathering.

Seldom, however, on this day had Harry's glance through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses wandered to

the benches. With many there he had danced and golfed and bridged a hundred times. That, however, had been play; this, which had come to furnish another and quite as fascinating a sort of entertainment for them, was what he had chosen to make the more serious business — in so far as anything had been serious to him — of his life. So that his apparent disregard of this tribute to his personality for the sober business in hand, set over against the palpable frivolity of purpose that actuated the moiety of his audience, was, after all, only another indication to them of that fine sense of the fitting for which his world admired him.

Through the long morning the evidence had accumulated. One by one the merciless rivets had been driven home by the prosecuting attorney. The chain of evidence seemed flawless. And Harry Sevier's cross-examination had seemed scarcely more than perfunctory — had appeared somehow to miss that subtle and pregnant suggestion, that longer reach that heretofore had uncovered a hitherto unnoted but baffling doubt. Yet to those who knew him this but pointed to a more effective climax, a more engrossing sensation when the psychological moment should arrive and that appealing figure arise to insert the nicely calculated spoke in the wheel that, under the manipulation of the state's attorney, was rolling so swiftly in its ominous course; and on the back-benches, where sat a group of members of the Country Club, a whispered bet that the

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accused this time would not get off, found as usual no taker.

Evidence finished, the Court rose for a recess and Harry vanished through a side-door. Ten minutes later he was in his office. He vouchsafed no word to the clerk who sat in the outer room, but passed quickly through to the inner sanctum and closed and locked the door. The self-control bred of the strenuous occupation of the court room had slipped now from his face, leaving it suddenly strained. There were moist drops upon his forehead but his hands were arid and dry. He drew the blind to shut out the dull, grey, winter light and switched on the electric desk-lamp, and as he did so his eyes turned stealthily to the wall — to a locked cabinet whose key was in his pocket.

They turned again almost immediately to the baize-covered desk, where stood a plain, flat silver frame. It held a photograph of a portrait painted by Sargent which had been a *salon* favourite of a few years before. It was that of a young girl, seated and leaning intently forward from an arm chair. One hand was at her throat, the other dropped against the dusky shoulder of a dog stretched at her feet, and in her dark eyes was the eternal question which maidenhood asks of life. The lines of the face were cameo-like, and its southern beauty held that particular blend of ingeniousness and hauteur that is the result of the selection and inbreeding of generations. He stood still a moment, looking fix-

edly at it, his tongue touching his lips, before he crossed the room and turned the picture face-down upon the desk. He almost ran to the cabinet, unlocked its mirrored door, and took from it a bottle and a glass. He poured out a full goblet of the gurgling liquid and drank it off. Then he drew a long breath.

"Yes," he said, "I'll lie to myself no more! I've got to have it or throw up the sponge. It was my own once, that wonderful gift — whatever it is. Once it was my own brain, unhelped, that sent the glow to my heart and the fire to my tongue — till words had glorious colours and pictures painted themselves out of nothing. Once it was my own mind that saw a problem as clear as crystal. But I wasn't content. I wanted the short cut, and this showed me the way. And now — now — I've dropped the reins. It's not Harry Sevier that wins cases — it's that bottle!"

He began to stride up and down the narrow room; deep lines had etched themselves in the mobile face. "There was the Davencourt Case," he said to himself. "Not a shred of decent evidence to go on, and the whole court packed with prejudice, and he was as guilty as the devil. Yet I won! That was only a year ago, but I couldn't do it now — without what is in that decanter! All day yesterday I was heavy, my mind was as blank as a glacier. In the cross-examination I couldn't see a foot before me. But for this half-hour it would go hard with my

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client at the finish. As it is I wouldn't want a better foil than old Maitland for the prosecution. How he has slaved over his witnesses! I might have made some of the testimony that sounded so damning look like a cocked-hat if I had gone about it in his laborious way. For this 'Paddy the Brick' has plenty of friends, for all his crookedness. Half the logging-camp, apparently, chipped in to make up my retaining-fee. But pshaw! what's the use? I can get him off without it. In the last analysis it's feeling, not facts, that will sway them — feeling first, and then conscience. Every man of them must see *himself*, first shivering in the shoes of my thief, and then wearing the Judge's gown. When the psychological moment comes there is only to drive home the fallibility of circumstantial evidence and sear those twelve slow-going, matter-of-fact brains with a sense of the inherent perversity of appearances! "He smiled bitterly. "Especially," he added, "when there's whisky in the story. My client was drunk as a boiled owl when he was arrested — the stolen plunder might easily have been put on him, as he claims it was. The jury will understand that. There's probably not a man on it who doesn't get squiffy now and then."

He stopped in his walk and held up a hand against the light — it wavered ever so little. The draught had not yet brought its accustomed poise of nerve — its tense certitude, its mental glow and confidence. With an impatient gesture he turned again to the

cabinet. "One used to do it," he said; "it will evidently take more to-day to restore our bold Turpin to his career on the highway!" He set the empty glass in its place with a short laugh.

"Curious," he said. "If he *were* innocent and drink *had* got him into this scrape, there would be a poetic justice in drink's getting him out!"

As he turned to lock the cabinet, the bell of his desk-telephone rang — three short, sharp rings. It was the clerk's warning that the court was about to reassemble. He drew a deep breath, and cast a quick glance at the little mirrored door. No tinge was rising in his colourless face, no warming tingle in his veins. His hands were uncertain and his fingers had an odd numbness. A keen, cold edge of anxiety touched him. Always heretofore, when he had sat with the black decanter, he had felt the wonderful, slow change — the gradual glow creeping through every nerve, the tightening of muscle and sinew as for a race, the thrilling, glad sense of renewed power and unleashed ability and the inevitable quivering rush of lambent images in his brain. The signal was too long in coming to-day — and he could not wait! His hand shook as it reached again to the little shelf. An instant he hesitated — for a breath, while the light twinkled from the deep-cut facets, he strove to remember whether he had drunk one glass or two. Then with a frown he poured the draught and drinking it off, locked the cabinet, and went hurriedly out.

When he entered the courtroom, the wide space had filled again and the State's Attorney had opened his address — a brief one, icily emotionless and rigidly exact — the very background upon which so often Harry Sevier's winged words had spelled victory for a cause prejudged as lost. And he was to reply — with the final speech for whose inspiration he had fled to that locked cabinet in the darkened inner-office. Paddy the Brick listened with the look of some trapped thing gazing at its captor, sometimes turning toward his counsel a furtive wavering glance that was blent equally of dread and dog-like appeal. These glances were unreturned. Harry Sevier sat motionless, his eyes straight before him.

But behind that mask Harry's thought was turning and turning upon itself. The sudden sharp edge of anxiety that had caught him in his office had grown to a thriving fear. His ally was failing him. The master, whose upper hand he had just acknowledged — whose aid had been so freely given him in really vital moments — was forsaking him at the turn of a wretched, second-rate case of common thievery! He realised it with a sickening sense of wonder that mingled with a dull anger at the littleness of the issue, and through the confused mist of his mind his inner ear seemed to hear a far-distant sardonic laughter — as though the Djinn of the bottle laughed in the locked wall-cabinet at his dismay.

He rose to speak for the defence with an icy clog

upon his faculties, while beneath that frozen surface the something that had been shackled reared and struggled vainly. Vocabulary, cunning of phrase, and logical sequence of argument had not deserted him; he realised this with a blind rage that seemed with a singular separateness to lie outside of himself — to associate itself strangely with the prisoner. But the persuasion that had so often checkmated justice, the calculated force, the insinuating tactfulness, the living, warm appeal that had had their way in the past were absent. He had a curious feeling of duality, as though two Harry Seviers had suddenly and painfully drawn apart — the one whose measured voice was speaking, and the other which clamoured and appealed, conscious only of its own deadly smother and of the despairing face of the man with the wiry sand-coloured hair who sat slouched in his chair beside him.

The roomful seemed very still. The Judge was looking at him fixedly, through bowed horn-glasses set far down on his nose. Harry was aware that in the countenance of the state's attorney puzzle and a stealthy relief struggled together. With desperate narrowness he watched the faces of the jury for a sign, a tentative withdrawal of stolidity that betokened a quickened and awakening interest. But they sat moveless and impassive. There was a last hideous pause, in which he thought the foreman suppressed an incipient yawn, when his own brain refused further struggle. He knew that he had been

betrayed. The door of human sympathy would not open — he had lost the magic key.

The reply of the State's Attorney was a mere *résumé* of the evidence. He had needed no more. The Judge's charge was brief. Then had come the stir of moving bodies and the buzz of whispers — the shuffling of feet as the Judge retired and the jurors filed out — and at length the painful hiatus with the red sunlight and the pallid lamps.

This was broken presently by three measured raps on the door of the jury-room, which, as the Judge re-entered, opened to admit the jurors. They were quickly polled and the verdict given — guilty. The sentence followed immediately.

With the fateful words Harry Sevier turned his eyes, almost as if suddenly awakening from sleep, upon the court-room, and met across the moving benches a woman's concentrated and wondering look. She was Echo Allen, the original of the portrait whose photograph lay face-down upon his office desk. The neutral-tinted presentment, however, had been far from realising the concrete flush of sensuous beauty of its living original, with her straight lithe frame, her hair all a wash of warm russets and sunny golds, framing a face perfect in contour and with a complexion as soft as a moth's wing. And the beauty of this was now deepened, if possible, by the shadow upon it of puzzled pain and inquiry. An instant the gaze between them hung, then it broke as she turned away, gathering her white

furs about her throat with a slow, hesitant gesture.

With the sudden stab of shame and humiliation that rushed through him — for he had not seen her there before that moment — something seemed to break, too, in Harry's brain; it was the rigid lock which had been somehow put upon his faculties. The emptying room felt all at once a furnace, and little jerking shocks, like tiny electric currents, were running over him, prickling to the tips of his fingers. Intoxication was upon him, sudden and overwhelming, but he did not recognise it. He had never been drunk, in the sense popularly understood. He had always regarded with wondering distaste the occasional abject surrender of mind and body to the effect of alcohol with which he was familiar in men of his class, and the vulgar spree filled him with disgust. He was nicely abstemious at his club and he had never entered a saloon in his life. His indulgences, deeper and more and more frequent as they had grown of late, had been hidden behind the shades of his inner office, and the liquor he had drunk there he had never carried in his legs. For him these cloistered hours had meant no harrowing aftermath of remorse, no shrinking memory of license or ribaldry, but only the strange mental exaltation that had borne him to success. He sat now outwardly calm and collected, but mentally in an odd confusion, grasping at strange alert suggestions that were thronging about him in a lurid phantasmagoria.

He came to his feet with a start, suddenly aware that the slouching figure beside him had arisen at the heavy touch of the sheriff's hand. He took a step forward, the lawyer for a moment again uppermost, the perplexed mind groping for the conventional expression of professional regret. But he did not speak. Instead, as the narrow, red-rimmed eyes stared for a breath into his, Harry's outstretched hand fell at his side and a painful blur swept across his vision. His unsober, kaleidoscopic mind had opened to something that lay naked and anguished beneath the haggard face of the prisoner, something no longer glossed by sullen scowl and sneering bravado — a concrete fact, perturbing and vaguely horrifying, which would not express itself in mental symbols.

With hands clenched and a face like a sleep-walker's, Sevier crossed the emptying room to the side door, where his motor now waited. "Anywhere, Bob," he said thickly, "but go like the devil till I tell you to stop, if it's a thousand miles!"

As the burnished mechanism shot into pace and the cool wind stung his face, the early arc-lights above the roadway swelled to great pallid moons tangled in a net of stars, and in their yellow lustre the thing he had seen in the prisoner's face suddenly shouted itself to his brain. He flung up an arm as though to ward a blow.

"He wasn't guilty!" he gasped. "He never did it, by God!"

CHAPTER II

A MAN AND A WOMAN

THE girl whose gaze had for that instant found Harry Sevier's across the crowded court room left the place with her mind in a conflict of feeling. She was nonplussed. She had entered for that last hour sharing intuitively the general belief that the prisoner would be acquitted: a belief, founded like that of the rest, upon her knowledge of his counsel. She had seen no straining for the spectacular in what some had been wont to call "Harry Sevier's pyrotechnics," and on past occasions on which she had heard him address a jury she had fallen wholly under the spell of that peculiar magnetism that swayed all alike. Aside from his continuous success in a calling with which her whole life had been associated — her father, Judge Beverly Allen, was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and his father had been Chancellor before him — with his brilliant way, his undenied leadership among his fellows, he had been to her a dominant personality. She had not lacked the masculine homage of a dozen others of their set, but Harry Sevier had always been the imminent figure in her thought, and it had needed no spoken word

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or promise between them to link her imagination wholly to a future in which he reigned supreme. So that his failure to-day had affected her strongly.

On the dusky court house steps she stopped to exchange greetings with a group who chatted there. They were full of the puzzle of Sevier's failure, or laughingly rueful at their own discomfiture, and she stopped but a moment before a negro coachman tucked her into a carriage. As he climbed lumberingly to his seat and gathered up the reins, a heavy, assured figure approached the curb. Cameron Craig was big and broad and in his strong and arrogant face lines of conflict had early etched themselves. He shook hands with her with a smile.

"I didn't know you were in town," she said, with a trace of aloofness.

"I'm here for only a day or two," he answered. "I had to talk a little politics with my attorney, Mr. Treadwell. It's his busy day, it seems, and as the mountain couldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet came to the mountain. So here I am at the halls of justice. It's been an entertaining afternoon — the trial, I mean — but upon my word, I thought at first I had strayed into a convention of the Daughters of the Confederacy."

She smiled, but it came with difficulty. "Oh, court has become a social dissipation with us. It competes now with auction-bridge and the fox-trot."

"You tempt me to steal a purse or two," he said. "I love to hold the centre of the stage. The only

thing I've been charged with stealing so far is an election, but one never knows to what heights he may rise. If I pick your pocket will you come to my trial?"

"If it were *my* pocket, I'd have to, wouldn't I?"

He bowed smilingly and turned away, as the coachman flicked the tossing manes with the tip of his whip. Looking over her shoulder, while the horses whirled her away, Echo saw his big frame swinging up the steps into the emptying building, every move expressive of virile strength and conscious power.

These were traits Cameron Craig had acquired through direct inheritance. His father had come penniless, to a small town in the adjoining state where, with calm assurance and without unnecessary delay, he had married the neighbourhood's prettiest girl and pre-empted a worn-out iron deposit with a tumble-down furnace, relic of a series of disgusted British owners. With the same certainty of judgment he had uncovered the lost ore, developed the property till it paid a miraculous dividend, and died. He had been a man of one idea — the "Works" — and had known and cared for nothing else. The son, however, with his father's force and will, had inherited, with less praiseworthy traits, a further ambition. The young Cameron Craig's first free act after his schooling ended was to dispose of the iron plant and to throw his money and his brain together into a group which now stood

back of the great Public Services Corporation that held in control the vested interests of two states, exclusive of the railroads. At thirty he was a personality that loomed large in organised politics, and might be depended on to loom steadily larger to the end of the chapter.

As he entered the old building now he was thinking of the face of the girl he had just left, with its brilliant beauty and flashing youth.

"Why not?" he said to himself. "She has birth and breeding, but I can match them with things the world counts as high. I've never failed yet to get what I wanted — if I wanted it enough!" His thoughts recurred to the trial and to Harry Sevier. "Curious that nobody seemed to guess what the matter was — none but me. But I know what that look back of his eyes meant. The young fool! To have that gift — every thing right in his hand — and then to throw it away. For that's what it will come to, sure as fate, in the end!"

A hand fell upon his shoulder. It was Lawrence Treadwell, the attorney, and he followed the latter into a private room and sat down. "Have you got the new committee list?" he asked, without preamble.

For answer the other took a closely written paper from his pocket and handed it over. "Senator Colby sent it down by his secretary this morning."

Craig drew his chair to the table and began to make pencilled changes and corrections, his hand

moving swiftly and unhesitatingly. "There," he said, returning it. "That will be better. Let the senator have it back to-morrow." He sat a moment silent, his strong white fingers drumming on the table. "By the way, is this young Sevier likely to take a hand in the next campaign?"

"I don't know," replied the other. "I've always expected him to burst into politics some day. He has a curious hold on people — a wonderful magnetism. To-day's is the first jury case I've ever known him to lose. He as well as let it go by default. How he came to handle it so beats me!"

Craig might have enlightened him, but he did not.

"I've concluded we don't want him," he said. "He's uneven: the trial to-day proved that. Besides, he's too high-chinned — we can't depend on his type to obey orders. We are coming to a big fight and we want the docks clear. No overtures to him. We must cut out every man whose absolute footing we can't count on till the day of judgment."

The attorney lit a cigar and regarded its blue haze thoughtfully before he answered. "All right," he agreed. "I should have picked him for good material. But you're the doctor."

Meanwhile the carriage was whirling Echo Allen over the darkening asphalt. The tired night lay still, watching under dusky lids, the moon, a great blown magnolia, floating in the limpid sky. As the

horses pounded on, the coachman's voice broke in upon her revery:

"Reck'n Marse Harry done got dat man clar, Miss Echo, lak he allus do?"

She drew her furs closer about her throat with a little gesture as though dismissing a baffling problem. "No, 'Lige; not this time."

"Sho' now!" he exclaimed, looking back with his thick, blue-black lips framed to a whistle. "Muss-a been pow'ful guilty ef *he* couldn't git him off. Ah reckon dem yuthah lawyahs 'cluded dey wanten tek Marse Harry down — he done put it ovah *dem* so off'n — en dey jes' tek dat 'cused man, en fool eroun', en fool eroun', tell dey done *prove* it on him!"

But 'Lige's sage reflection upon the situation brought no smile to Echo Allen's face.

At length the horses came to a great double-gate, lighted with heavy wrought-iron lamps, opening on a curving drive, into which they turned, to swing panting up to a wide-porched mansion set in a grove of oaks and acacias. This was "Midfields," the home of the Allens for four generations and of the Beverlys before them. Its wide wings and columned front spoke of old colony days, as did its name of a time when rolling acres of tobacco instead of suburban streets surrounded it. Twilight was drifting thickly over it now, and the box-hedged garden, with its plenteous rose-shrubs and wild sundial, was purpled with shadow.

Echo jumped down without assistance and ran into the hall, throwing off her hat and coat and pausing before a glass to pat into place the rebellious whorls of her springing, gold-brown hair before she entered the dimly-lighted library.

It was a wide, pleasant room, with tradition and gentle birth in every line of its furnishing. The table held an old China lamp of gilt and *lapis-lazuli* blue, and the simple, colonial book-cases were of rich-veined mahogany which held the same shimmering, tawny lights as Echo's hair and had leaded-glass doors in key with the silver, glass-prismed candle-sticks on the mantel-piece. A huge old English screen of painted leather stood at one side. On the dull green walls were framed steel engravings of the ancestral home of the Allens in Dorsetshire and of that sturdy ancestor, in lace and peruke, whose rugged signature is on the Declaration. The place had but one modern touch — a splendid portrait of Echo herself that hung between two great windows — the canvas whose photograph at that moment lay face-down in Harry Sevier's inner office.

In the room sat her father, the Judge, perusing a magazine. He was a pale, placid man, straight and grey as a silver-birch, with ivory, distinguished features that suggested an old daguerreotype and seemed to call for a silk-velvet waistcoat and a stock. He tossed the magazine aside as she came to him and stooping, in a swift birdlike way she had, dropped a kiss on the top of his billowy, grey hair.

"There you are," she chided, "ruining your poor eyes with fine print in this wretched light!"

She turned the reading-lamp higher and drew the curtains. As she pulled the heavy folds together they swept from its place a heavy brass bowl filled with Marechal Niel roses, and it fell with a crash onto a frail Italian desk of dark rosewood quaintly inlaid with designs in lighter colour, which sat in a corner.

She sprang to catch it with a cry. "I'm as bad as Uncle Nelson!" she exclaimed. "How lucky it didn't spill!" She set the bowl back and passed a hand along the polished desk-top, frowning. "It has made a terrific dent in the poor old thing!" she said, remorsefully. "It must have jarred it frightfully. I'm so sorry!" She looked at her father, who had half risen at her cry. "You were always fond of the little old desk, though you never used it. I used to love it when I was a child. It was so mysterious, with its tiny cubby-holes and carvings. Some one told me once that such foreign desks always had secret drawers and I used to spend hours trying to find one. Where did it come from? Did it belong to grandfather?"

"No. It was willed to me many years ago by — a friend. It was when you were a baby."

"How curious," she said, "for a man to choose a piece of furniture like that! Why, it's as feminine as a toilet-table!" She came and perched one

small toe on the fender, as he asked: "Where's Nancy!"

"I haven't seen her since luncheon. She was going to tea at Cora Spottiswoode's."

"Her father has written me she must come home at the end of the week," said the Judge. "He says if she doesn't he'll start an action against somebody for kidnapping—says nobody can fix his coffee just right but her."

She smiled. The two families were life-long friends and since their boarding-school days she and Nancy Langham had exchanged annual visits. "I'll tell her," she said. "I wish she could stay longer, though it's lonely for her father, no doubt. I love to have her here. She's—fond of Chilly, and I've been hoping it—might have an influence over him."

The Judge sighed. The name of Chisholm Allen, Echo's twin-brother, was a synonym in the city for debonair devil-may-care. With the likeliness that kept him popular even among those staid members of society who did not countenance his peccadillos, he combined a negligence and dissipation that from his boyhood had made him a thorn-in-the-flesh to his father.

"Yes," he said, "she's fond of him. That's why I think she shouldn't stay too long."

There was silence for a moment. Then he said in a lighter tone, "I wonder how Sevier's case came

out. It was expected to finish to-day, wasn't it?"

"Oh," she answered, "he lost. The jury found against him. I was there for an hour, just at the end."

He made an exclamation of surprise, and stole a quick glance at her, but she had bent down to straighten a shoe-buckle and he could not see her face. "Ah well," he said, "it won't do him any harm to get a set-back now and then. Perhaps he needs it. Were there many there?"

"Half the world," she answered. "I saw Cameron Craig."

"So he is in town, eh? I must send a note to the hotel and ask him to luncheon to-morrow."

She was silent and he said quizzically. "Come, my dear, you mustn't be such a chin-tilted patrician. 'Other times, other manners.' Craig has his place, and it's not a low one, either."

She made a move of impatience. "He's a member of the best clubs in his own city, and all that, I know. He belongs there. But here it is different. We are not beholden to him. Why should we go out of our way to treat him like one of us? He isn't, really. He may be a University man and he may have travelled all over the world. Yes, and I'll admit he has manners — a manner, if you like — too. But there's something that keeps him an outsider just the same. Besides, people tell unpleasant tales about him."

Her father cleared his throat. Gossip had been

prolific in tales of Craig as regarded the fairer — and frailer — sex. He had heard the stories — unsavoury ones, such as inevitably cling to men, whatever their business or social standing, who acquire the whispered reputation of the voluptuary. He had himself, however, a singular reserve of judgment, coupled with an impatient intolerance of scandal. Men to him were as he found them, till the event proved otherwise.

“I know what you mean,” he said judicially. “He hasn’t our traditions and standards. That’s true. He’s not born to them. But this is an uncharitable world, my dear, and half the tattle one hears is apt to be sheer envy. He is a person of importance. He has a good deal of influence, as well as money, and is affiliated with men with whom a large part of my earlier life was associated.”

She hardly heard his closing words: “Influence and money!” she repeated, with a little shrug. “Why need we bother about them! The Judiciary, thank heaven! has nothing to do with political influence, and as for money, I should hate to think that what we have came, like his, from the United Distilleries!”

“Echo!” The name fell sharply behind them.

Both turned — the Judge a little self-consciously — to where his wife stood in the doorway. She was already dressed for dinner and her dark corsage set off her white neck and beautifully rounded shoulders — a cool, statuesque woman, of unfailing

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poise and manner, with her grey hair perfectly disposed above a complexion whose tinting was the despair of many a younger matron. Instinctively the girl's hand had crept into the Judge's arm, and insensibly the two had drawn a shade nearer together.

Mrs. Allen stood looking at them a moment, faintly smiling, before she said deliberately, "That is a ridiculous way of talking. Please let me remind you that your father was the Trust's counsel for many years, and until he went on the Bench."

"Oh, I forgot—" she began, distressed. "I only meant—"

"There, there!" the Judge said, frowning. "People feel differently about those things. You have a perfect right to think in that way, if you choose."

"I couldn't think anything *you* did was wrong," she cried passionately. "And, anyway, giving a company legal advice is very far from being in its business. *Every one* has to have lawyers, of course. They defend even criminals."

He smiled quizzically at her argument. "Well," he countered, "I'm respectable in my old age, at any rate." He had pressed a bell as he spoke and to the grizzled negro who now entered he said, "Nelson, has your Marse Chilly come in yet? If he has I'd like to see him."

The old man shook his head. "Marse Chilly done tellyfoam he won' be home fo' dinnah, suh."

The Judge pulled his chin, palpably annoyed, but quick to his resentful mood, Echo laid her hand caressingly on his arm.

"Never mind, dear," she said coaxingly. "Don't fret about Chilly."

Mrs. Allen's voice interposed. "Chilly sent *me* the message an hour ago," she said, with an accent that seemed finally to dismiss the topic. "I think you would better dress now, Echo. Nancy has been in some time, and dinner's at seven-thirty."

CHAPTER III

THE AWAKENING

AN automobile speeding through the starry dark! No hesitant progress through congested traffic, no frequent swerving for daylight wayfarers. The city was far behind now — only the clear, well-nigh deserted road, winding like a tremulous magenta ribbon through the swooping gloom that seemed to shrink and cringe from the metal monster hurtling after its golden halo through the eddying dust.

A practised hand was on the throttle and the yellow-lined face bent over the wheel was shrewd and keen. There had been no supper for Bob that night and no evening at Black Joe's billiard parlour, but the chauffeur knew his master. "Go like the devil till I tell you to stop," the other had said, and without the word from the moveless figure on the rear seat, he would obey till the engine stopped or his hand went numb on the wheel. Hamlets flashed by — huddles of flaring street-lights — then shadow and blankness again. Now and then a hollow rumbling marked a bridge, or a jovial, beckoning doorway betokened a road-house. Ten, twenty, thirty miles. A turn of the wheel and the car swept

into a divergent highway. Another mile and again a turn — Bob was shuttling back and forth now, fearful of an impossible distance from home.

The man behind him sat as if graven in stone. At first, while his senses instinctively resisted the intoxication, Harry had been conscious only of blind movement, a frantic flight to escape the unescapable. Yet his whole body was tense, his eyes never wavered, his hand was as steady as his chauffeur's. He was sharply conscious of all about him, every sense recording its message unerringly. He felt the wind-flung dust, heard the chatter of the exhaust, grasped acutely at each detail of sight and sound in the reeling panorama through which they passed with such arrow-like swiftness, under a sky that was a wild, blue field of silver flowers. Yet the governance of the mind, the sole arena in which the intoxicant ravaged and rioted, the logical faculty to which sense-impression is but material, was astray. And at length the intoxication had wholly conquered.

And with the acknowledged dominance of the sinister thing that held him, the mental turmoil had swiftly stilled. There had come sudden composure — a strange, appalling peace, in which was no appreciation of place or time or fact, but yet a curious exaltation, a sensation of seeing not through a glass darkly, but with a further mental vision which knew no material bars.

Three hours, four hours — and still no sign. Bob stole a glance behind him. "Wonder what's

the matter?" he muttered. "He sure never did want to go hell-bent-for-election like this before. Lucky I filled the tank plumb full this morning. She's good for another forty mile, I reckon."

As he withdrew his eyes he became aware of a red light swinging down into the road — a railway-crossing. He threw himself forward on the gear and with a grinding roar the brakes took hold. Plunging and shuddering, the car stopped dead, its forward lamps jingling against the warning bar.

With the sudden stop Harry lurched forward. And, curiously, with the abrupt cessation of motion and roar, the vast, vague distance through which his mind had been shuttling, closed instantly up. The baleful intoxication had lifted as it had come. He did not wake fully at once, for the breaking of the spell left him in a strange confusion through which he saw but dimly the outlines of the real present. He found himself sitting dazed and shaken in his motor — staring at the broad back of his chauffeur beyond which, an isolated point in the darkness of the night, swung the angry red lantern of the crossing. He put a hand to his forehead — what was he doing there?

It was coming back to him. He remembered the straining trial, the hour in his inner office — with the little wall-cabinet! He saw the crowded courtroom, saw himself standing impotent before the bar, saw the despairing face of the man beside him, the puzzled countenances about him, the dim lamps.

He heard verdict and sentence. He saw himself turn to gaze into the face of the girl across the court-room — knew the swift rush of the motor, the blazing arc lights and that final stab of realisation!

His lips tightened to shut back something like a groan, as there rushed upon him a sense of horror, of disgust, of shame. The Harry Sevier he had been — the Harry Sevier of good repute, of disdain for the intemperate, of brilliant accomplishment and regular habit, was gazing with horrified eyes at the Harry Sevier he had unwittingly become, the slave of the spirit he had so long invoked, whose coarse debauch had to-day betrayed his client, and sent an innocent man to the wretched cell of a convict!

He spoke. "Bob, where are we?"

The chauffeur stole a quick glance behind him — there was relief in it. "Penitentiary-Crossing, sir," he said. "There's the Black Maria." He pointed to one side, where the gloomy vehicle, a wheeled ark with a narrow barred window set in its rear, waited with its patient mules.

The train was at the crossing now and the rumble of the brakes swelled to a vibrant screech, the long dotted line of dimly-lighted windows shuddering to a stop right athwart the road. A train-man with a lantern jumped down, followed by a couple of passengers. Harry opened the door of the tonneau and suddenly conscious that he was stiff and aching

in every joint, achieved the ground and took a step toward the train.

Two figures just then emerged from the glare. He saw that they were linked together by a wrist and as the coat of one blew aside, the lights of the motor glinted from a nickel star — the badge of a deputy-sheriff. They had passed him, and the train was moving again to the *chug-chug* of the engine, when the officer turned back, biting the end from a cigar.

"Could you give me a light?" he asked.

"Certainly." Sevier took a silver match-box from his pocket.

The other struck the match, hauling irritably at his lagging prisoner, and the red light, flaring up, for an instant showed the two faces, the sheriff's grim and tenacious, and the one beside it — a white, dogged face, with red-rimmed eyes and a shock of sand-coloured hair.

Sevier shrank as though at a blow in the face. He drew a sharp breath, for the sight pierced to the excoriate spot that lay like a live coal in his soul. There before him stood his client of that day's trial, on the last lap of his dismal journey, the man whom he, Harry Sevier, had sent there! Back of this man of the law, with his gleaming star and pocket revolver, he saw himself standing, the real mainspring of that blatant enginery.

The flare of the match fell. "Well, good night to you," said the deputy-sheriff.

"Hold on," said Harry. "Can a prisoner use money?"

"They're not supposed to, but I reckon money talks as loud in a concrete cell as anywhere else."

Sevier had taken some crisp yellow-backs from his pocket and now he held them out — to the jail-bird. "Here!" he said. "Take this."

The other looked at the bills with a suddenly contorted face, then with a whirl of his unfettered hand dashed them on the ground. "Keep your money!" he snarled. "I'm a thief — that's what *I* am now! When I want money I'll steal it!"

The sheriff made an exclamation, and jerked viciously on the tethered wrist. "Don't you mind, sir," he said. "You mean it well, but this is an ugly one. Lord love you, they'll soon take that out of him over there! Come along, you," he added to the other, pulling him toward the Black Maria, "and if you open your face like that I'll give you what for!"

Sevier stood an instant looking dully after them, then mechanically picked up the fallen bills, fumblingly replaced them in his pocket, and climbed into the motor. He felt his face suddenly hot. In those flung words his judicial mind recognised the indictment. From the little wall-cabinet in his inner-office had crept a thing of shame and humiliation to himself. He saw this now suddenly swell and grow — as did the vapour from the fisherman's cruse — to a blighting, tentacled thing, reaching

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interminably into the future, holding in its coils a human life of pain, of desperate warfare, of social outlawry.

He sat down on the leather cushions like one in a dream.

"Home now, Bob," he said, heavily.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRODIGAL

AT Midfields that evening the late moonlight poured a flood of radiance on the wide columned porch with its climbing roses where Echo sat on the step, chin in hand, absorbed in her own thought. She was alone. Nancy had slipped off to bed, her mother had retired to her room and her father to the quiet of the library and his reading.

From the kitchens she could hear the muffled clash of table-silver and the strident voice of Aunt Emily the cook, grumbling at Nelson: "Yo'-all hurry erlong wid dem ar fawks, now! Speck ah's gwine wait heah all *night*, yo' triflin' trash, yo'? Yo' heah me—yo' ain' blind! What yo' 'spose Marse Bev'ly *pay* yo' fo', anyhow?" From far down the road, beyond the gates, she could hear the faint twang of a guitar and the refrain of strolling, darky voices:

"Reign! Reign! Reign-a mah Lawd!
Reign, Marse Jesus, reign!
Reign salvation in-a mah soul,
Reign, Marse Jesus, reign!"

These died away with the sharp, eager bark of a dog. Then at length distinguishable sounds faded

and there was only the deep, somnolent peace of the southern night, with the scent of the roses wreathing the garden with their intense, mystical odour — only the faint stirring of little leaves playing hide-and-seek with their shadows, and the thin, fairy tone-carpet woven by the myriad looms of night insects for near whispers to tread on.

Since that homeward ride she had had no time to ponder upon the event of the day. At dinner the trial had been touched upon but casually. Now that she was alone, however, it had rushed uppermost in her thought. It was not that Harry Sevier had lost the verdict: but his speech had seemed to her, in the tension of the crisis, with a man's honour and liberty at stake, inconsequential and almost flip-pant. And in the measure of her disappointment she had realised anew the depth of her regard for him. Again and again she pictured the scene in the courtroom but each time her thought returned upon itself, baffled and puzzled.

At length, with a long breath that was almost a sigh, she stirred, and rising, passed into the library where the Judge sat in the arm-chair by his reading lamp. "You're a disgraceful night-owl," she said, "and I refuse to keep you in countenance any longer."

He smiled at her. "That's right, Sorrel-Top! It's time for beauty-sleep if you and Nancy are off to ride in the morning. Just give me my eye-shade, will you, before you go?"

She brought the green crescent and snapped it on his forehead. "There! You haven't told me how you like my dress to-night. It's a new one."

He looked. "It's beautiful."

She turned about before him. "I do choose well sometimes, don't I?"

"You do everything well, my dear." In his tone now was a quaint and curious humility which always touched her when she discerned it — something of utter fondness and dependance — and she smoothed his iron-grey hair, one of her characteristic endearments, as she kissed him good night.

Upstairs Echo opened the door of her room softly. It was hung in blue — that shade which one sees in a Gainsborough ribbon, a Romney sash or a Reynolds sky — and its furniture was of simple white, with large pink dahlias trailing over the chintz window-curtains and chair-cushions. In the dim night-light the triple mirror of the dresser reflected the carven four-post bed, in one of whose pillows Nancy's dark head was already buried.

"Is that you, Echo?"

"Yes, it's I. Were you asleep already?"

"Almost," yawned Nancy. "I *shall* be in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Has Chilly come home yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Do you think he's really at the club, Echo?"

"Of course I do."

"Men are so queer!" sighed Nancy, drowsily.

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"We had such a lovely evening—all except Chilly's not being there."

Echo slipped off her gown and drew out the pins from her hair, letting it fall in a shimmering cloud to her waist. Then in the moon-light she drew a deep chair before the open window and began to brush out that wonderful mass of stirring gold that curled and waved about her bare, round shoulders. Below her the garden lay, a mass of olive shadows, wound in cloudy golds and misty greens, sprinkled with moon-dust and drenched with the dizzying scent of roses and honeysuckle. All was lapped in the utter quiet of the night—only the swift wing of a night-bird shook the darker clump of ivy that marked the sun-dial. A long time she sat there, the brush parting and smoothing the bronze mesh with long sweeping movements, gazing into the whisper-haunted gloom and listening to the measured breathing of the girl behind her that seemed to form a rhythmical current for her own thoughts.

All at once in the hush there came the clashing of the gate at the foot of the drive and jovial "good-byes," mingled with a hilarious voice asseverating that its owner had had "the time of his young life."

She bit her lip. "It's Chilly!" she whispered, with a frowning look over her shoulder.

She listened intently. There was the crunch of an uncertain step on the gravel, the sound of a

stumble from the porch — then the slamming of the front door.

The dulled sound reverberated through the old house. It roused Nancy and she sat upright in the drift of silken coverlets, her eyes heavy with sleep.

“Is it Chilly?”

“Yes. He has just come in.”

“Is he —?”

“I’m afraid so, dear.”

The younger girl caught her breath. “Oh, I hope your father has gone to bed. He’s so hard on him!”

Echo turned. “How can he be otherwise?” she said, sadly. “It’s so often and often it happens, nowadays. Won’t you try and influence him? He cares for you, darling!”

Nancy’s hands were clasped tight about her knees. She stirred uneasily. “How can I, Echo? A boy has to have a little bit of a good time once in awhile. I wouldn’t want him to be a molly-coddle! He won’t be any the worse for it when he gets older and settled down.”

“The worse for it!” The words fell sadly. “Don’t you think he is the worse for it already? He’s making no progress with his law-study and he’s been two years out of college, now. There’s nothing to blame but his drinking — and the company he keeps. What will be the end of it? Oh, Nancy, you *have* a responsibility. Every woman

has with some one man. If women only wouldn't countenance it as they do!"

"But, Echo — you talk as if Chilly was — as if you thought he was doing something disgraceful. Why, he's a gentleman; he *couldn't* be anything but that, no matter what he did!"

Echo came to the bed and sat down beside the other. In her filmy night-gown, wound in the mist of her loosened gold shadowed hair she looked like some ethereal thing in the moonlight.

"Ah, that's just what so many say! That a gentleman is a gentleman whether he is drunk or sober! It's not so with other things. Is a gentleman a gentleman whether he lies, or cheats at cards, or not? Isn't there to be any standard, really? Don't you see that there never will be any penalty — as far as drinking is concerned — until women *make* it? Listen, Nancy. The year I came out, I went to a dance — my first big one. There was a boy there who followed me about all over the floor. He wanted me to dance with him, and he was — he could hardly walk. At first I was frightened, but at last I grew angry. I asked a lady why he was not asked to leave the floor. She seemed quite astonished and indignant. 'But,' she said, 'don't you know who he *is*? That's the son of General Moultrie!' It was Cale Moultrie. You know what became of him, don't you?"

"Yes." Nancy's voice was muffled. "But Chilly —"

“ Oh, my dear, there was a time when Cale drank no more than the others, and everybody liked him — as they do Chilly. It’s coming to be the same with him, I’m afraid. There’s no penalty for him yet because he’s Chisholm Allen — because he’s father’s son! ”

She stopped, caught by the sound of a sob. In another moment her arms were around the frail little body and the flower-like face was pressed hard against her breast.

“ I don’t care if he is d-d-dissipated,” said Nancy passionately. “ I’d rather have him come to me d-d-drunk than any other man sober! He’s just Ch-Ch-Chilly, all the same! ”

CHAPTER V

THE UNLAID GHOST

ON the ground floor of the old house all was silent save in the dining-room, where a single electric bulb threw into garish relief the dismantled table with a bowl of fern glowing like a fountain of emeralds against the dark wood. It lighted the Chippendale sideboard, before which Chisholm Allen confronted old Nelson, the butler. A cut-glass decanter of sherry was in one hand; the other was alternately fumbling uncertainly with the stopper and pushing back the persuasive fingers of the aged negro. His straw hat was tipped awry, his face was flushed and his eyes unnaturally bright. He was laughing immoderately.

"You old black stick-in-the-mud!" he said. "What's the matter with you? Think *you* own that decanter, eh? Well, you don't, not by a long shot. *I* do — Chris'mas present from the Duchess. Hope to die if it wasn't. Leggo, you virtuous old chicken-thief, and give me a tumbler!"

"Now, Marse Chilly!" The low voice was deprecating and appealing, and there was love in it too — the deep, changeless affection of the old-time negro for his white master. "Yo' *knows* yo' don' want no mo' dat ar. Yo' done had er plenty at dat

ole club down town. Ef yo' tuck away any mo' now, yo' gwine have er haid lak er rainbar'l on yo' shouldahs in dee mawnin'! Yo' *knows* yo' is!"

Chilly's hand dragged at the black detaining fingers. "What do *you* know about heads? Take your fool hands away, I tell you! I'm only going to take a couple of swallows."

"*Ah* knows dem ar swallers," pleaded the old man. "Yo' go erlong tuh baid. Hit's long pas' midnight. Marse Bev-ly's in dee lib'ry."

"Oh bother!" said Chilly irreverently. "He's gone to bye-bye long ago. "Shut your face or you'll wake him up."

"Fo' dee *Lawd*, Marse Chilly!" stuttered the old man. "Ah heahs him comin' *now*! Ah sho' does!"

"You can't bamboozle me!" laughed Chilly. "Old Huckleberry's been snoozing this hour! If he does come, you and I'll drink his health. Eh? Wonder what he'd say!"

He was not to be left in doubt, for at the moment the hall-door opened. His father stood on the threshold. He was dressed and the green eyeshade was on his forehead.

"We will dispense," he said in a tone of quiet hardness, "with a ceremony which, however filial, is somewhat ill-timed. Nelson, I think you needn't wait up any longer."

"Yas, Marse Bev'ly. Yas, suh." The old man went to the door, hesitated and came back. "Is

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yo' sho' yo' don' want nothin' else, Marse Bev'ly?"

"Nothing further, Nelson."

"Yas, suh. Good night, Marse Bev'ly. Good night, Marse Chilly." This time he went out, closing the door behind him with exaggerated caution.

"Come now, Judge," said his son, still mirthfully. "There's no masonic funeral going on in the bungalow, is there? Can't one have a harmless night-cap without being excommunicated?"

His father looked at him from under the green shade with gloomy disapproval. The address did not tend to mend matters; his son was wont to reserve the judicial title for moods of especial mellowness such as to-night's. He noted the flushed face and sparkling eyes, the general air of goodnatured recklessness that so clearly spoke the nature of the other's evening's pleasure.

"We'll discuss that to-morrow." He crossed to the wall and laid his hand on the electric switch. "Good night."

Chisholm still smiled without apparent resentment. "I guess you weren't ever as young as I am, Judge, anyway. You seem to think I'm a rotten bad lot just because I like to take a glass now and then and go out with the boys. You drink *your* mint-julep all right enough. And I'll bet whoever you had to dinner to-night took as much as I've had under *my* vest. The only difference is *I* haven't had

any dinner. It does make a difference, I assure you."

His father's hand was still extended to the wall. "I said good night, Chisholm."

Chilly shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, what's the use?" he said listlessly, and went unsteadily out by the rear door.

The Judge snapped off the switch, and putting out the light in the library, ascended the stair. The hard look had deepened on his face. As he gazed at that nonchalant epitome of ribaldry he had thought of other men who had so often been grouped about the table in that room — men of tempered habit, of standing and achievement. His own son had contempt for such company. It bored him. He preferred to "go out with the boys" and to come home in the small hours — as he had to-night. So he was thinking as he entered the room above. There he stopped in surprise, for across the threshold stood his wife. She was in her night-gown, over which she had thrown a robe of pale crêpe with lace at the neck and wrists. Her face showed a heightened colour and her lips were trembling. He drew forward a chair.

"I thought you were asleep long ago," he said.

She declined the seat with a gesture. "I heard your voices. What did you say to Chilly?"

"I said 'Good night,'" he answered heavily. "That was about all."

Her lip curled. The glance she gave him was critically cold. When she married Beverly Allen she had loved him — in so far as she had been capable of loving. To her marriage had meant the assumption of woman's predestined place in the social fabric, the inevitable change of habit which time brings to all, with its widened orbit and opportunities. She had been drawn to him by every instinct of selection which took count of name, standing, worldly endowment and mental equipment; but there had been behind it no throb of maidenly impulse, no thrill of the great current that feeds the romance of the world. The one point at which life for her caught and focused had been the son, whose misconduct stood so sharply out against the spotless Allen name. He was her one weakness, her love for him an unreasoning passion that had swayed her from his birth. To her his transgressions showed as venial, his delinquencies as but the forgivable errors of youth. The few instances in which he had been openly called to task by his father had been sharpened in the latter's memory by her resentment. But on none of these occasions had her husband seen her so moved as now. He did not know that for many minutes she had stood on the dark landing listening to the murmurous voices, and that now she resented what seemed to her a deliberate evasion. She spoke with slow, even point:

"As a monologist Chilly is a distinct surprise. Was he saying 'good night' also?"

Under the unaccustomed anger of her voice the Judge's pale face flushed. He took off the eye-shade and set it on the table, as he replied evenly:

"Chilly is not himself to-night, Charlotte. Does it matter particularly what he said?"

Beneath his voice now there was a kind of subterranean compassion, a note almost of entreaty, as though in this trouble that touched them both he could have wished to comfort her, if, indeed, she had made that possible.

She made an involuntary movement — not a sign that a chord had been touched, but rather a mark of agitation. Chilly was the one subject upon which she could not bring to bear the tempered reason which otherwise marshalled her even life. It seemed to her now that she was being thrust aside, in the interest of some new plan of discipline and coercion. She turned swiftly on her husband.

"I suppose you think it should make no difference to me!" Her eyes blazed. "You are so sure you understand Chilly! You — his father — have you ever really known him all his life? Does he ever come to you when he is in trouble or needs advice?"

Her voice held a bitter sarcasm and again the flush swept up the Judge's pale face. But his voice was emotionless as he said, "Chilly never felt the need of advice from any one. He goes his own sweet way."

"That is just it!" she said. "You set yourself so far above him. You have such a contempt for

his pleasures and so thoroughly despise the company he keeps. Suppose he has a taste for liquor. He is still a gentleman, I believe. But you, with your solemn rectitude and your touch-me-not self-righteousness — *you* would drive him to the very people and places he ought to keep away from!"

He stared at her. "I have never regarded my repugnance to his habits as inducing him to further excesses," he said slowly. "Nor have I set myself up as preacher. Perhaps I have never understood him as — you do. I only know that his ways are not my ways. He has had every advantage that education and environment can confer. He is older than I was when I began practice. But what is he making of his life? He thinks of nothing but playing fast and loose at country-houses and loafing at the club and acting the fop and the fool generally!"

Her shaking hand was plucking at the lace at her throat. His every word had been a live coal laid to her resentment. "Is that the worst you can say of him?" she asked. "Can't you call him sot or black-leg?"

"Not yet." He was feeling now a dull anger at her scorn, at her persistent disapproval. The throb of sympathy he had first felt had been frozen by her icy reproach. "There are other things I wish to be able to say of my son. I want him to be more than a decorative philanderer. I want him to be a man — one to whom men may look for manliness, and women for honour!"

She had grown pale to the lips. "‘And women for honour!’" she repeated. "As *I* looked to — *you!*"

He had flung out his arm with a characteristic gesture, but at her last words it suddenly stiffened and remained, as if it had been frozen in the air. Slowly it dropped at his side as he stared at her with ashen face — a look of shocked and disconcerted inquiry. For the exclamation, as at the swift slash of a blade, had torn away a veil, woven of time and habit, that covered an old wound. For twenty years by tacit consent this hidden thing of the past had never been acknowledged by any word or deed between them. Now a single sentence had laid it bare, quick and quivering and mutually confessed. They had been married twenty-two years, and if in that early period he had discerned any lack in her, he had given her no reproaches. On her part, she had fulfilled what she esteemed her whole duty, and in her own mind stood blameless. And he had had his profession. But in the end starved nature had reasserted itself. There had come to him a passion, swift and terrible while it lasted, to which he had surrendered wholly — till death swept it from him. The gall and wormwood had been sweetened then by the birth, in merciful coincidence with that loss, of his twin children. He had thought the episode buried forever from sight and hearing, but a later chance had discovered it to his wife, and in her own immaculateness she had been able neither

to forget nor to forgive. It had made no difference in her life before their world. Cold and perfect and correct, she had held her way, but from the day when she had faced him with his secret in her hand, their hearts had been strangers to one another. He had climbed high and she had risen with him. And in twenty years no word had fallen from her lips to open that old tomb — till to-night when the heavy doors swung ajar at the echo of that one exclamation.

“As *I* looked to — *you!*” There it was — the old ghost, called up to haunt his present as it had waylaid his past. His hand fumbled for the discarded eye-shade and adjusted it as he slowly said:

“I have never counted myself a pattern, Charlotte — least of all for my own son.”

She caught the note of pain and weariness now in his voice, and something new and unaccustomed stirred for one brief moment in her heart. She had struck harder than she had intended. But she had lost control at a critical moment and old bitterness, that had never been tintured with the sweetness of charity and forgiveness, had sharpened her tongue. Now his shocked white face smote her with a sense of self-reproach whose very strangeness threw her momentarily off her poise. For a fleeting second words trembled on her tongue that might have dissolved the icy barrier between them. But the golden second passed.

“That is generous,” she said with a distant laugh.

"No doubt Chilly will profit by experience, if not by precept. Shall you be at court to-morrow?"

"Yes," he answered. "I have a hearing."

"You will prefer the horses, then," she said, turning to the door. "I will take the electric for my shopping. Good night."

He opened the door for her. "Good night," he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE JUDGE SITS IN THE LAMPLIGHT

IN the silence of the room the Judge stood for a moment with his hand at his lips, as though he tasted blood. The summer night outside was very still. The curtain before one of the windows swayed gently in the air and from the acacia trees on the lawn he could hear the sleepy twitter of an oriole. He turned off the light and went into the hall. There at one side stood the white, panelled door of his wife's room. It was shut. It came to him that it stood for a perfect symbol of that cold immaculateness of hers which had so long denied him the living bread of sympathy. She could forgive anything in her son, but nothing in her husband. For twenty long years they two might have dwelt at opposite ends of the Milky Way, and it seemed to him suddenly monstrous, whatever the cause, whosoever the fault, that they, being man and wife, should yet be so far apart.

He went slowly down the stair again, his hand, shaking a little, slipping along the polished banister. The dim night-light made the lower hall a place of ghostly shadows. He re-entered the library, moved to the table and turned on the reading-lamp. Then, lifting it to the limit of its silken cord, he threw the

electric glow upon the canvas that hung above the mantel, studying it intently.

"Mine!" he muttered, with a sort of fierce satisfaction. "Mine, every inch — mine, not Charlotte's! My blood gave you that curve of brow and those full lips and that deep, dark blue of eye — they are of my side, not of hers! You, at least belong to me!"

He returned the lamp to its place, and turning, cast his glance at the little Italian desk in the corner. His lips trembled. At that desk she had sat — the woman knowledge of whom had sharpened the sword of his wife's never-dying disdain. The woman who had come into his life too late! He thought of their meetings, few enough, indeed. How often he had wondered how life would have turned for him, if at the end she had listened to his desperate pleading, and gone with him along that alluring way that had drawn him like an opal path among Italian asphodels, flinging to the winds social standing, reputation, career, friends, honour, all! If she had said "yes" to that wild letter he had sent her — the one to which she had vouchsafed no reply — which might have been written in his very heart's blood!

He looked again at the painted portrait of Echo, in her splendid youth and clean heritage: the answer was there.

He sat down before the little desk, stretched his arms upon it and bowed his head upon them. "You

were right, Eleanor," he sighed. "You were right. But somehow it's been so long!"

He felt a fluttering touch upon his hair and started up. There before him on the desk lay a faded leaf of paper — a page closely written over in twirly, dim writing. He lifted it up and held it to the light, his nostrils catching a scent wraith-frail and delicate, like a dead pansy's ghost —

No — no — no! Why did you write it? Why did you put it into words? For now I must keep it always. I cannot destroy it. You *knew* I would not — *could* not — let you do what you beg me to! Never, never! I am not so mad. Nor are you, really. It is not your best self speaking in this letter. Sometime —

His gaze became fixed. He gave a hoarse cry — a mist was before his eyes. He snatched at the top of the yellowed sheet — it was dated twenty years before, and the hand-writing, how familiar! He laid the leaf flat in the lamp-light and read it through, with every nerve throbbing to a memory that had started afresh, as instinct as though days, not years, had sifted their dust upon it:

Sometime you will thank me — will think of this only as a ghastly indiscretion from which you were caught away in time. We do not make the world we live in, and it is a thousand times stronger than we are. No, if we play the game we must stick to the rules. To think of overstepping that boundary, in such a desperate fashion, gives my fastidious sense

a strange recoil — something like that curious shame and confusion that associates itself with a dream in which one finds one's-self scantily clad in the midst of wondering strangers! No — no! I do not think I shall send this letter — but perhaps I may at the end. For I am going away. I sail to-morrow. Shall I see you again — ever — ever? What will you think —

That was all. It broke off abruptly as though the writer had laid it aside, never to be finished.

In the silent library the Judge looked at that mute witness as at one risen from the dead. Twenty years of absence and silence — twenty years out of his ken, save to the thriving memory! For how long the hand that had penned those lines had been dust, yet the poor symbols of ink and paper persisted to confront him now! How had the sheet come to be on that desk that she had bequeathed him? It had not lain there a moment before.

He brought the lamp and examined the desk attentively, pulling out every tiny drawer, sounding each carved partition, twisting and tugging at every projecting portion of the ornamentation. With a thin, metal paper-knife he explored each warp and crevice. But his search was fruitless. If the leaf had slipped from some crack — loosened, perhaps, by the fall of the brass bowl upon it that day — the old desk kept its secret.

A strange feeling stole over him, the feeling of mystery that comes to one with some sudden apposi-

tion of incident that thrills with a sense of an overpowering meaning in a circumstance in itself banal and trivial. Something of her proud and passionate spirit she had etched into those lines. Might it be that spirit, somewhere in the great void, reached out to him through this silent witness — to say that love does not wholly die?

He gently spoke her name. "Eleanor! You forgave me for writing — that. If you hadn't you wouldn't have left me this desk when you — died, away over there in Florence! So I've got your letter at last."

He sighed again and groping for his big chair, sat down, with the sheet of paper spread out upon his knee.

On the upper floor Mrs. Allen tapped lightly on Chilly's door and when there was no answer, opened it softly and entered. At the whisper of his name he started up in bed.

"Duchess!" he exclaimed.

The pet name, as always, touched her. It was a perennial tribute to that stateliness and dignity which she had made her own. She came and sat down on the edge of the bed and he caught her hand and held it to his lips. "You shouldn't have come," he chided. "You'll take cold."

"I heard your father talking to you," she whispered. "You — you know what he dislikes so. Why can you not be — discrete?"

Chilly moved uneasily: "Oh, I know," he said. "But I can't always be giving an imitation of a quaker meeting! I'm not a child."

"You must not anger him," she said. "I — for my sake, I wish you would be more careful."

He patted her hand. "All right, Duchess! I'll mind my p's and q's. But you must go back to bed now. Don't you worry about me."

She bent down and kissed him on the forehead before she glided from the room.

CHAPTER VII

ARROWS OF DESIRE

"**H**ERE is the new rose," said Echo. "Its name is the Laurant Carle."

Cameron Craig looked — at her, not at the blossom. She was in simple white and as she stood there in the perfumed garden, vivid, elemental, tuned to the wonder and passion of living, her slim figure outlined against the dark green shrubbery and her face and gold-bronze hair touched with the slanting sunlight, she seemed herself some great, rare, golden flower in a silver sheath. Lines he had somewhere read sprang into his mind:

"Bring me my bow of burning gold,
Bring me my arrows of desire,"

and, contained man that he was, he caught his breath at the sudden leap in him of the thing that had been covered and hidden there so long, something fine and keen as flame, that set his habitually cool blood beating under his eyelids.

"It was not the rose," he said. "I had another reason in asking you to come here."

"Yes?" Her voice was evenly inquiring.

"It was to ask you if you will marry me."

She took a quick step backward; a look of amaze

had sprung to her face. "I?" she exclaimed. "You want me to — *marry* you?"

"Yes. Is there anything strange in that?"

She looked away. In all her thoughts of the man before her there had not lurked this possibility. She had been bred among youth who, whatever their other vices, maintained a chivalric ideal of woman-kind which excluded fast-and-loose conduct; and the whispers that clung about Cameron Craig — set, as they were, over against his force and undeniably brilliant attainments — had lent her opinion of him a certain cold contempt. And now here he was — he of all men! — saying this to her! And it was no hasty impulse: she read that in the steady, confident eyes, the hard, heavy jaw, the steadfast, deep-lined face.

She felt his waiting gaze. "No," she answered, slowly. "Perhaps it is not strange. It is only that the unexpected seems so." She looked at him curiously. "Why did you ask me — to-day?"

"The opportunity came," he said. "It must have, sooner or later."

"So you have intended for some time to say this to me?"

"Since I first met you, a year ago," he answered. "You have two things that I want — as I have their complements."

She considered this a moment. "Forgive me," she said then, "but I am a very curious person — as well, it seems, as a very blind one. Would you

mind telling me what are those two qualities that you imagine I possess, which you value so highly?"

"Breeding, first," he replied, "and all that it implies. You represent a stock."

She nodded gravely. "And the other desideratum?"

"Beauty. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"And — the complements of these things, that you possess?"

"Money," he answered. "And the power it gives — the accessories which a woman like you must have if she would really live. I think you don't doubt that my wife shall have these things."

She shook her head. "Not in the least. Indeed, I am sure she will. But you see, Mr. Craig, I happen to be not at all the sort of person you think I am — the kind you wish to marry."

"I'll risk that!" he flung her.

"The proof is that you ask me — as you have. The things you have to offer seem overwhelmingly attractive to you, no doubt, but I'm afraid they mean much less to me." He could not see the look that was in her face now, for her head was turned away. "I have no longing for money. I could be contented in a mountain lean-to, with morning-glories instead of an orchid conservatory. I could cook my own meals on a gas-stove and live in one room over a hardware store — with the man I loved. I don't care particularly for what you call 'place'

either. I could be happy enough on a prairie — with the man I loved. But love must be there, Mr. Craig."

"Do you doubt my love for you?" he asked.

"You had not cited it," she rejoined, calmly.

"You spoke of money first —"

"Because I have lived long enough to know that it is the paramount requisite in most women's eyes."

"Your estimate of me by the mass was flattering," she said with gentle satire. "Have you been so busy making this wonderful money of yours that you think it can take the place of everything?"

He made an abrupt, almost angered, gesture. "Surely you know money means — has meant — nothing to me!" he exclaimed. "I am rich, yes. I dare say I could buy and sell almost any one you know. But it was never the main thing. It was *winning* that counted. It was the game, and money was only the counters. I played to win and I have won. And wealth was a stepping-stone to other things."

His voice had subtly altered and he drew closer to her where she stood, moveless and straight against the dark foliage, her gaze averted. "Then — I met you! I have known many women, but they have been nothing, less than nothing, to me! Business has been the only thing that really counted. But since I met you, the whole world has been changing for me. Even my work isn't the main thing to me any more. The main thing is *you!*"

She lifted her eyes, wide with the swift sense of the unexpected — touched now with an odd, disquieting prescience. His voice was no longer the cold, even voice of the Cameron Craig she had known. There was passion in it. She saw his big hand tremble.

"There has never been a day or hour since then when I have not wanted you! You have entered into my blood and my brain, and the want of you has coloured all I have thought and done! If this is love, then I love you — Echo, Echo!"

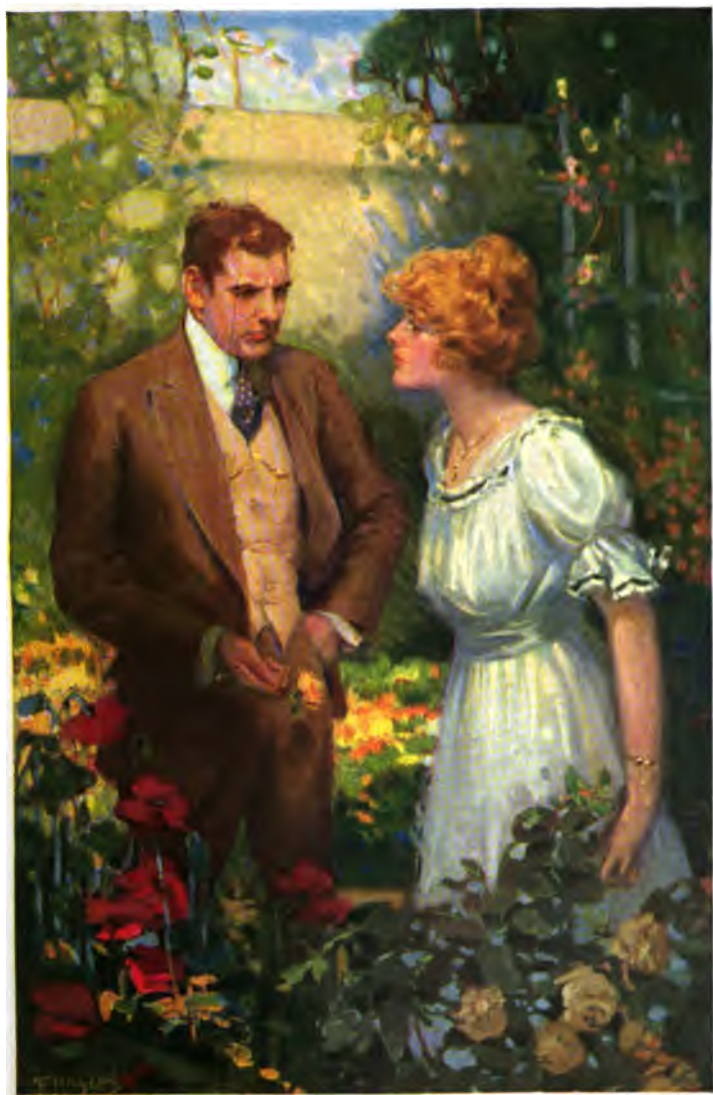
She shrank perceptibly at the name on his lips. "Stop!" she said. "The love you talk of must be mutual. I do not — care for you in that way. I never could!"

"That makes no difference to me!" he protested. "I know what I want — I always have. And I want you."

"No," she said. "It is not the real *me* that you want, but we can pass that by. The important fact is that you have offered your last price and the bid is declined."

He looked at her with a sudden flash in his eyes. "Do I deserve that?" He had grown pale to the lips.

"Yes, you do. I have told you that I should never love you. Yet that means less than nothing to you. You have apparently not considered my possible love as a requisite in the case. It is 'breeding' you want, and beauty — and for that you make



“I have answered you,” she replied, “once and for all. You will please consider it final”

your offer. You propose purchase, not exchange, Mr. Craig. Well, I am not for sale!"

He flushed to his hair a dark, heavy red. He appeared to be controlling himself by a fierce effort. "Don't answer me now," he said. "Let me speak to you again later."

"I have answered you," she replied, "once and for all. You will please consider it final."

A whirl of what seemed almost rage shook him; with a single stride he reached her and seized both her hands. "Is there — another man?" There was what startled her now in the harsh, hard voice.

She stiffened. "Well," she said, "—and if there is?"

At the chill quiet of her voice all the vicious strength and intolerance of the man blazed out. "You are right!" he said savagely. "It could make no difference to me! I will not take your answer — do you understand? In time you will give me a different one. I have waited for other things and I have had them in the end. I can wait for you!"

He released her hands — so violently that she fell back a step. Then, while she stood regarding him in shocked and indignant amaze, summoning all her forces to meet this fury that had both astonished and repelled her, his face swiftly changed. The flush of anger ebbed, the flash died in his eyes.

Once again his accustomed self, with the steady, confident eyes and swing of shoulder, he drew aside

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to let her pass and followed her along the box-bordered path to the piazza.

As they entered the blue-parlour, a lady very smart in black-and-white, and a sailor-hat whose girlish brim youthened her mature beauty, rose from her seat with Mrs. Allen and Nancy Langham, Echo's house-guest, a slight, glowing girl of nineteen, with eyes like marigolds in shade.

"Well, Echo," she said, "I thought you never *would* appear. I just ran in to remind you that you and Nancy promised to come to my dinner to-night at the 'Farm.' I've asked some of the youngsters out for a little dance afterward." She smiled a brilliant recognition to the heavy figure behind her.

"Mr. Craig!" she exclaimed. "So you are in town! How nice it would be of you to come too. Or do you find country-club gaieties too stale and unprofitable?"

He bowed over her hand. "My dear Mrs. Spottiswoode!" he said. "This is my lucky day! I shall be more than delighted!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE THRUST

THE "Farm," as the Country-Club was popularly known to its habitués, was a long, three-storied structure of red brick on the selvedge of the southern suburb, set in a grove of maple trees facing a lake whose still depths were stirred by budding water-lilies, like the breasts of young girls. With its golf-links, and tennis-courts and its ball-room which formed an L at one side, its white, balustraded verandahs, it was the favoured resort of both the frivolous and athletic; its monthly dances were the gayest of the season's informal functions and on Saturday evenings its row of little dining-rooms, that looked out on a gentle slope of shrubbery and gravelled walks pricked out with paper lanterns, were favourite resorts for small dinner-parties.

Mrs. Spottiswoode's dinners were apt to have a pleasurable sprinkling of youth and sobriety and to-night the dozen of the younger set found sufficient foil in the fashionable rector of St. Andrews in clerical dress relieved only by the tiny amethyst cross that swung upon his waistcoat — in Senator Peyton, party-whip at Washington and one of the state's

distinguished citizens, with piercing sword-grey eyes under brows as black as midnight — and finally in Cameron Craig.

As Echo Allen had said to her father, the latter was not "one of them." The phrase to her had been an instinctive expression of that subtle sense of caste that had been born in her, springing from long lines of gentle ancestors that linked back beyond the days of the Old Dominion. But the distinction lay deep in the mental formula of the man: it was not to be perceived in externals. To-night, in his faultless evening-dress, with his keen, strong face and assured manner, he had an air even of distinction that well became him, and the instant's painful embarrassment that Echo felt as her hand touched his in their first greeting yielded quickly to an unwilling admiration of his poise and control. If that flare of passion in the garden had left its traces, they had been successfully covered. He was once more the Cameron Craig she had known — till yesterday.

But beneath that unruffled exterior Craig's every pulse was in tumult. At table he found himself opposite Echo. The decorations were red roses and in a ruby gown with a single rose in the coil of her tawny hair, she seemed to him an inherent part of the scheme, a ruby pendent to the rich, shimmering setting. There had been many women to whom he had been passingly attracted — his tastes had been catholic enough in that regard! But he had never seen one whom he had wished to marry.

He had spoken truly when he said that the women he had known had really meant nothing to him. His licenses had been but incidents after all. They had not ministered to the mental side of his nature, whereas this passion had taken swift and complete possession. As he saw her now, her cheeks flushing to the glow of the candles and her eyes like softly lighted sapphires, he felt open wide within him an abyss that thronged thick with distempered imaginings. There was another man! She had not denied it. And with the thought there grew in him a slow, cold hatred and determination.

Yet his face, as Echo glanced across the roses, betrayed no sign of disquiet. He was apparently listening amusedly to the small-talk of his partner, Nancy Langham, in a gown of pale gauze that made her look like a small, eager tiger-lily caught in a hampering cloud. In the interstices of conversation Echo could catch whiffs of her laughing nonsense:

"Isn't Dr. Custis quite *wickedly* handsome for a rector! I've been instructed *not* to ask him if he is related to Martha Washington. The man across from Mrs. Spottiswoode is Richard Brent, he is 'The Herald,' and a power in the community, I believe. Our hostess is wearing the new wave; it costs a lot, but they say it's guaranteed to last six months. And to think," she sighed, "that Melissa, my maid, spends a dollar a week trying to have her wool ironed *straight!* The man with the goatee, who looks so Spanishy, is Mr. Horace Leighton, the

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New York artist who is doing the mural paintings for the new City Hall here."

"So there isn't any one here who isn't anybody!" Craig observed.

"Only me," she said. "The reason I'm asked is because I'm frivolous. I'm supposed to offset the feast of reason with bubbles and froth."

"At any rate," remarked the senator, "seriousness is not to fall in arrears. Down at the other end they have actually got to politics."

Echo's glance followed his. Their hostess was holding a glass of wine between her eye and the candle-light, which splashed a bright crimson ray on her pretty face. It was the rector who was speaking:

"As for myself, I'm afraid I'm a friend to all the old, hackneyed arguments. 'If meat maketh my brother to offend,' you know." He pointed to his wine-glass, which, with the arrival of the soup, he had turned upside-down. "You see I am consistent."

"Politics?" queried Echo. "It seems to be only teetotalism."

"Ah," the senator answered, "but it's coming to be the same thing nowadays."

"One understands the individual objection on moral grounds," said Mrs. Spottiswoode. "That's a matter of personal belief and conscience. And the Church must be above criticism — must take the

sterner course. But for those of us who *don't* think it wrong, the other arguments seem so — so local. I suppose drinking does keep the negroes from doing as much work as they might, but it's hard on the rest of us to have to cut our cloth by the farmer's pattern! We here, for example, at this table, are to go without our sauterne because he has trouble in getting in his tobacco."

"Exactly," agreed the churchman. "The greatest good of the greatest number. And isn't that true democracy, after all? But of course the agricultural problem is the least of it — there are the figures of poverty and crime. The two are twin-brothers, of course. And drink is the father of them both. Will, character, determination — a man with these may overcome the habit. But these are just the qualities that men in the mass lack. When a weak man falls our system keeps him down. I once heard Thomas Malcolm — every one here knows of him and his work, I presume — say that for the average drunkard to reform with a saloon on every corner is about as easy as to hoist one's-self out of hell by one's boot-straps. I'm inclined to think he is right. And I never saw a drunkard yet — a real Simon-pure drunkard, I mean; not a mere sophomoric tippler — who wouldn't jump at the chance to reform if he could. But he has no more chance of winning out now than a gambler against loaded dice." He paused, with a little gesture. "But

then," he added, "the modern political movement for prohibition has made every one familiar with the basic arguments."

Treadwell, spruce young corporation attorney and cotillon leader, looked up interestedly from the other end of the table; the hostess's fan had begun to flutter — a sign of agitation. For Cameron Craig's affiliations with the great Trust were well-known, though presumably not to the clergyman, who had met him for the first time that evening. Craig, however, seemed quite unconscious of personal implications.

"Do you seriously think, sir," he asked, with the faintest trace of irony, "that the statistics of crime would be materially lowered in your state if it went 'dry' next year?"

"I do," replied the rector with emphasis. "And not only lowered. They would be practically wiped out. There wouldn't be enough left to constitute an item in the appropriation for public printing."

"Naturally, however," Craig observed, "as the state has always been 'wet,' exact data is lacking to assist one's speculations."

"On the contrary," said the other. "Every jail furnishes them. I think," he went on, turning now to Treadwell, "that it is the experience of every criminal lawyer that liquor, in some phase or other, has been back of the larger proportion of cases he is called on to defend."

The young man nodded. "I never had any ex-

perience in criminal cases," he said, "but I should think you were not far wrong. What do you say, Brent?"

"I agree with you," the journalist answered, "but my view of course is a superficial one. It is a pity that Harry Sevier isn't here; we should have got a valuable opinion."

"You may be gratified then," said the hostess. "Though Mr. Sevier couldn't come to dinner, he will be here for the dancing."

The senator spoke. "Sevier! I heard him in court yesterday."

"So did I," commented Nancy, aside. "I gave up an auction-bridge for it, and I wish I hadn't. It wasn't exciting at all."

Mrs. Spottiswoode looked relief—at last the talk had shifted to safe ground. "He lost the case, I hear," she said. "I wonder what was the matter. Wasn't he in good form?"

The senator looked thoughtful. "In one way, yes," he replied judicially. "I confess, though, I had rather expected something different, but just what I scarcely know."

Nancy turned her small, piquant face. "I know. We all expected Mr. Sevier to do what he has done so often—but didn't to-day. Oh," she exclaimed almost angrily, "while he was talking along, like a machine, I could have shaken him!"

"That *would* have furnished the sensation!" said Treadwell. "And I should think it might have

had its effect on the jury, too. Juries *can* be intimidated. I wish you had tried it."

She made a little face at him across the nodding roses, then turned more earnestly to her partner. "I don't know anything about court matters or criminal trials, but from where I sat I could see the man he was defending. He looked so hopeless and — scared! I wanted to stand up and scream across the room: Can't you *see*? Look at the poor thing there! Make the jury *feel*! You were thinking the same thing too, Echo, I could see it in your face."

Echo lifted her eyes. In the candle-light her cheek held a rising flush. She looked across at the rector. "What do you think, Dr. Custis?" she asked, evenly.

He responded promptly. "Perhaps the explanation isn't so far afield. I presume the man had confessed to him and Sevier knew he was guilty."

Echo was conscious of a wave of relief at an explanation so simple and credible. It had never occurred to her to question the accuracy of other verdicts Harry had won in the past. Each had seemed to her the triumph of a just cause over a baleful combination of circumstance, the brilliant freeing of truth and innocence from entangling error and maleficent scheming. But if this man was guilty and Harry had known it beyond question, what other outcome had been possible? At the moment she saw in that even, cold presentation of

the court-room only the conscientious determination of the lawyer, who, as the law prescribed, stood by his client to demand that justice, if she must exact her penalty, prove conclusively every jot and title of her ground.

Craig's eyes had been regarding her steadily. With the spreading of that flush upon her cheeks a covert, laughing allusion that had come to his ear on the court-house steps on the day of the trial darted to his mind. A cool, keen certainty rushed through him. Sevier! Fool that he was not to have thought of him before! This young *flâneur* — and drunkard! — this petty trifler with his profession! Was that white indignation of the garden, this vivid flush, for *him*? He leaned forward, his heavy voice, intense and well modulated, addressed the clergyman:

“An interesting hypothesis, but the implication seems hardly safe. A lawyer's responsibility to his client is a very grave one. He owes none toward the commonwealth — the state's attorney takes care of that. Any less conventional view should appeal to a lawyer, I think, as dangerous and uncalled-for.”

“What do you fancy was responsible for Sevier's method of defence in this case?” asked the rector.

There was an instant of blank silence. The conversation had absorbed the lesser talk and other voices were hushed. Craig's look was set upon the long oval damask with its glistening silver and baskets of brilliant fruit, its leaf thin glasses with

languid beads rising in their liquid amber, its knots of fern and bonbons. His big fingers were twisting the stem of a goblet. When he spoke it was as though he had not heard the question.

"I attended a trial once," he said, "at a frontier town in the far southwest, a border community where procedure is very primitive. The man was charged with murder. He was a school-master, I believe, and in a quarrel with some local bully or other, had killed him. I was in the place on some land-business and went to the trial for mere amusement. The whole neighbourhood was there. Both men, it appeared, had been in their cups, and self-defence seemed an adequate plea. Acquittal was regarded as fairly certain — the more so as the District Attorney was the bosom-friend of the accused man, and everybody knew it. There was almost no attempt at evidence, which didn't seem surprising under the circumstances, and the state made the baldest farce of its cross-examination. The real interest came after a rather long recess that preceded the final speeches. The prisoner's counsel was a young man with a rough, direct address that caught the people. He had them pretty well with him, too, and when he sat down there seemed very little reason why the jury should even leave the box. The speech had been a fairly long one and as it had grown dark, candles had been brought in and set about — two on the judge's desk and some on the tables."

Echo repressed a start. It had come to her suddenly that there was a significance in what he was saying — a suggestion that a quick clairvoyant sense told her was principally for her. In the few words he had, with apparent unintention, sketched the actual scene in the court-room of the day before, and while reversing its elements, was picturing, in unfamiliar guise, its identical situation. She felt her face slowly harden, and turned her profile toward him, her hand playing with a spray of fern beside her plate.

“During the whole speech the District Attorney had sat in his chair, with his chin in his collar and his eyes closed, never moving. When his turn came he didn't rise; in fact, it was clear that he had been asleep. A laugh went round and the sheriff put a hand on his shoulder and shook him. He got up, looking confused, and while he blinked at the candles, some one in the audience called out, ‘Never mind, old man. If you can't make a speech, recite a poem.’ It was curious, but the remark seemed to give him a clue, and he began to recite Hood's *Eugene Aram*.”

Craig paused a moment and sipped from his wine-glass. All at the table were leaning forward intently. Treadwell was frowning at his plate. No one spoke; only a fork, dropped from Nancy Langham's fingers, rattled against the cloth.

“It was a strange sight,” went on Craig, “and one I have always remembered. You must picture

the crowded court-room, the gloom, the flaring candles, and the whole uncanny episode, to realise the effect that was produced. The man was by nature a marvellous actor — he would have made his fortune on any stage. At first it seemed as if he didn't know quite where he was, but then the ballad itself gripped him and he rendered it, acting each line, as I never heard it before or since. I had never realised what was in that poem. Very few there, I suppose, had ever heard it in their lives, and they listened in a fascinated silence while he rolled it out to the last line.

“ ‘Two hard-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the rain and heavy mist,
And Eugene Aram walked between
With gyves upon his wrist.’ ”

He paused again. “Oh, finish!” gasped Nancy Langham. “I don't like that story. What then?”

“When he ended he walked out of the court-room without waiting for the verdict.”

Echo's head turned toward him. “They found him guilty!” exclaimed Mrs. Spottiswode.

“Yes.”

“And you say the District Attorney was his best friend?” asked the artist.

“So I was told.”

“And yet wanted to convict him?”

Craig shook his head. “No, I didn't say that.”

“Then what,” inquired the rector, “do you take it, inspired him to such an extraordinary action?”

"Oh," said Craig, and as he spoke, for the first time he looked full at Echo. "It all came out afterward. He didn't realise what he was doing. He was drunk."

For an instant Echo's breath stopped. In the unexpected dénouement she had guessed, as at a lightening-flash, Craig's real purpose. Sharply, baldly introduced, the tale stood forth intrusive and malicious, an implied slur upon a man who was not present to refute it. Her whole being flooded with fierce resentment, mingled with an angry amaze that of all there no one else seemed to have caught the insinuation. To the rest it had been at most a *gaucherie*, a parallel which, if perhaps not felicitous, had been without significance and would be readily forgotten. Therein lay the added sting, that Craig had so accurately judged the outcome. He had guessed how it stood with her and Harry Sevier, and counting on her keener sensitiveness where the latter was concerned, had barbed his shaft for her alone!

The next instant, however, the tension broke with every one talking at once. From this babble the senator emerged with a negro story about a trial with "exterminatin' circumstances," which brought a ripple of laughter, and presently the hostess gave the rising signal.

The room opened upon the ball-room from whose further end already came the squeak of tuned catgut,

and beyond this spread the invitingly cool verandas, now beginning to fill with filmy gowns that showed pallidly against the evening dusk, where the bouquet of masculine segars mingled with the dewed scent of shrubbery. Here in the increasing numbers, unobserved as she thought, Echo stepped down onto the cool dark turf and following one of the little meandering bush-bordered paths, came to a rustic bench over which a paper lantern threw flickering rose-coloured shadows. On this she sat down, struggling to regain her lost composure and grateful for the sense of quiet and the cool inspiration of the water, over whose margin the moonbeams danced in elfish ecstasy.

In another moment, however, the silence was broken. A step sounded on the path, and she looked up to see Craig standing before her.

CHAPTER IX

THE TURN OF THE LONG LANE

ECHO came to her feet, all her blood on fire. In her resentment it had seemed to her that by very silence she had made herself party to that slur upon the man she loved, and she had been aching fiercely to repel it.

Craig tossed his segar away. He made no apologies for having followed her from the piazza. "May I sit here and talk to you?" he asked.

She remained standing. "Mr. Craig," she said with quiet emphasis, "I am glad you have come to me here. I have something to ask you which I could not have asked you — there."

He bowed and stood waiting.

"I fancied," she went on, "in certain of your remarks at the table a lurking innuendo. It is difficult to reply to such a thing. You would make it possible if you would put it in a more direct form."

"Your own observation does not appear to err in directness," he answered, after a pause. "I am afraid I must ask you to descend to plain English."

"In the course of the dinner you told a story."

"Henceforth I shall congratulate myself on my skill as a *raconteur*." His tone was mildly ironic.

"It seemed to me — and I think I am of average intelligence and not more fanciful than most — that by that story you intended to convey, an insinuation against the reputation of a gentleman whom I do not care to hear maligned."

He looked at her with smouldering eyes. He was feeling admiration for her quick, hot southern blood and resentful spirit. It was part of that splendid type of womanhood that he had determined to make his own. And that it was now displayed in defence of the man whose weakness he despised and whose personality he hated filled him with a dull, glooming fury. His lips twisted. "Maligned?" he repeated, in an accent that was a question.

"That was my word," she said steadily.

"You appear to attach an extraordinary importance to my tale," he retorted, with grim sarcasm.

"Do you deny that there *was* innuendo?"

He smiled. "I can endure even that suspicion, since it is such a compliment to my own subtlety. May I ask, in my turn, in whose interest you so valourously take up the cudgels?"

"Your story directly followed a reference to Mr. Henry Sevier's handling of a case in court here. The unexpected outcome of the trial in your tale was due to the fact that its chief character, though no one realised it, was under the influence of liquor. The implication seemed obvious — that Mr. Sevier was not himself when he conducted his defence."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You are the only one who has drawn such a conclusion?"

Her pale face blazed. "Oh, I understand! You intended the inference for me alone!"

"Well?" he asked, with aggravating calmness.

"Did you insinuate that, or did you not?" Her pent-up anger was tearing now at her self-control.

He laughed, a short, jarring laugh. He felt an insane desire to seize that slender, unyielding body in his great arms, to rain kisses on that vivid, scornful mouth with its short upper lip, and bend or break her like a sapling to his savage will. "Suppose I did," he said stonily. "What then?"

"That was a contemptible act!" The young voice cut like a whip-lash and involuntarily Craig's big fists clenched. "And if I were Mr. Sevier, I would horsewhip you!"

A sound from behind them fell across the surcharged quiet. Both turned astonished faces—Echo's quivering with feeling, Craig's set and stormy—upon the man whose name had just been spoken. Neither had heard his step as he came quickly along the grassy path, nor had Sevier guessed the situation till those pregnant sentences sent the blood from his heart. He had thought the secret of his failure unsuspected. The realisation now that one, at least, had guessed the truth had been instantly swallowed up in the bitter knowledge that it had fallen to her—the one woman in the world—to defend him, who was undeserving!

Craig regarded him with a veiled smile that was half a sneer. The apparition had come at a fateful moment. Then his glance passed to Echo. "May I ask," he said, "whether you have yet cross-examined Mr. Sevier?"

He bowed and went quickly up the path toward the lighted piazzas.

There ensued a silence in which two minds travelled far. Echo had sat down upon the bench, her face averted. Her anger had faded out and her heart was hammering at the thought that Harry had heard, in her defence of him, what was in truth a confession. Across the aching interval broke the wanton bubble of a whip-poor-will.

"Echo —" he said in a muffled voice.

She looked up at him in the feathery light. "You heard — I wish you hadn't. Yet I couldn't help it! That ridiculous slur! But you can't possibly imagine that — that any one who knows you —"

He stopped her with an abrupt gesture. "Wait. I want to — I must tell you something."

"No, no!" she protested. "You shall not! I need no assurance. Do you think that I —"

He shook his head. But for that last sneering look of Craig's, that satiric challenge, he might have maintained a silence that would have seemed to her only a proper pride in himself and a deserved contempt for the whisper of malice. But the look and sneer had flicked him on the raw, had called to some element of naked honesty deep within him. In that

second he had known, shame-stricken, that whatever the outcome there could be no evasion between them. There must be the truth. He was no longer what he had thought himself, but he would be no malingeringer.

"Thank you," he said, "for that! Yet what Craig wished you to believe — was quite true."

She stared at him unbelievably. "True!" Her lips formed rather than spoke the word.

"Yes. I *was* under the influence of liquor. But for that I should have won the case, I believe."

"But," she faltered, "I don't — understand. Why, I never saw you in — that condition in my life! I was there. I — I heard you speak."

"It is not the first time," he said steadily. "Nor the second, nor the third. Liquor helped me to win my cases. I thought I had made it my slave when it had made itself my master. This time it failed me. And I — I failed my client," he added bitterly.

She did not catch the note of pain, of deep contrition in his voice. Her own hurt was too keen. She only heard the high-built structures of her own ideals crumbling down about her feet. "So Craig was right!" she said under her breath.

"Don't think it is easy for me to tell you this," he went on. "It is because I must. All my life I have cared very little what others thought. But — you — I care what you think. I never knew how much till now, when I have thrown your good

opinion of me in the dust!" He bent and took her hands. "Echo, is it the death of your ideal of me?"

Her fingers trembled in his grasp. Pictures were flashing before her mind—frost-stung October days when they had galloped with the baying hounds, over the blown, tinted leaves and russet fields—winter skating-parties on the frozen river, summer dances like that of to-night, for which the music was now swinging a hundred yards away—always it had been she and Harry Sevier. He had been so superior to the blandishments of the smaller vices. Others had failed and fallen; only he had remained on his pedestal, a type of brilliant accomplishment. She saw now his success as unenduring, fictitious, his talents besmirched with the vice that was most hateful to her. "Not the first time, nor the second, nor the third!" In their own circle she had seen the dreadful cycle more than once repeated—the slow, baleful fastening of habit, the struggle, the piteous, ignoble yielding and the final slipping down to degraded depths from which there could be no resurrection. There was Chilly, her own twin-brother, with his feet set on the same primrose path. And now was it to be Harry Sevier? She shuddered and drew her hand from his clasp.

"I—see," he said, in a slow, even voice. "You can't trust me." It was not the Sevier that had kissed her hand who spoke now, but one whom that

gesture seemed to have flung an infinite distance from her.

"Can you trust yourself?" she asked.

Harry's tongue touched his lips — as it had done in his inner office on the day of the trial, when he stood looking at her picture on his desk. Since that day he had known no breath of the periodic craving. But now, curiously, he felt his mouth growing all at once arid and dry with the old slinking thirst. *Could* he trust himself? The question seemed to thrust itself at him with a malevolent significance. How much of his will had he indeed, surrendered? Did he know?

There rose up suddenly in him a savage resolution. Not another drop upon his lips — never, never! Not for the sake of success, not for his very life, never so long as he lived!

He took her hands in both his own, leaned down and kissed them. Then, without a word he went rapidly from her.

CHAPTER X

AFTER A YEAR

LAURENCE TREADWELL, the attorney, sat in his office negligently smoking a segar and staring down through the open window upon the busy thoroughfare beneath. Outside was the spring sunshine and the smell of growing trees. Just across from the building stood the city's new Opera House, over whose ambitious entrance was still stretched a canvas sign advertising a mass-meeting held the evening before under the auspices of the Civic Club.

He read the lettering reflectively as he blew out clouds of the fragrant, opalescent incense: "Protest Against Machine-Rule." He smiled. The old revolt of the Quixotic handful against the entrenched forces that had governed the city for a generation — one more of the popular ebullitions which punctuate modern progress, the familiar periodic dust-storms from whose turmoil the Old Guard emerged, moveless as ever in the saddle, to a new campaign dictated by the mighty Over-Lord, the great Public Services Corporation which, through its multiple ramifications, assumed to control the state's franchises, to dictate its significant legislation — even to influence its judiciary. As he read the

words on the canvas bellying in the breeze, his smile was cynical.

Yet the smile had a touch of wistfulness too. The movement had grown out of the general unrest, the keener public conscience, that had accompanied the political renaissance that in the past year had been sweeping over a dozen commonwealths. In the old southern city, wherein principles were not yet become mere hypocrisies and folk still preserved old-fashioned political ideals, it had attained to the prestige of well-known names and engaging personalities. Their forefathers had been men to whom honour and cleanliness in public life had meant all things and who had governed as naturally as they had breathed. And there were many among these to whom the new era, with its open sneer at public trust and its subservience to great aggregations of wealth selfishly employed, had become an increasing reproach. The man who gazed down from the office window had long ago made his choice. He had no illusions. He knew to what allegiance he owed his present position. It had been the reward of long and faithful service! Yet sometimes still the bonds chafed — sometimes still the new spirit that was stirring abroad struck through his ingrained habit, calling to him to do the impossibly fanatical thing!

There was a knock at the door and a man entered. It was Cameron Craig. He responded briefly to the lawyer's greeting and coming to the

window, stood a moment beside him, looking down at the hurrying wheeled traffic, the loitering pavement pedestrians — and the flapping canvas sign. He laughed a little, but without mirth.

“You were there, I suppose,” he said.

Treadwell nodded. “Yes. It’s tilting at the windmills, of course.”

“They began too late,” said Craig grimly. “The ticket is safe enough this year. But next year — the Gubernatorial campaign — if they only had fire enough to keep the blaze going till then, they might give us trouble.”

The other did not answer. His eyes had rested briefly on Craig’s face, then again had sought the window. He was thinking that his visitor had not changed for the better during the past two months. The fact, indeed, would have been apparent to a casual eye. The virulent force and will were no less noticeable, but there was now a kind of glaze over his face — a certain fierce and sullen quality that seemed a reflection of inner bitterness.

The judicial eye clove to the fact. Since that far-away night at the “Farm,” Craig’s passion had never loosened its grip. It was characteristic of the man that he had on that occasion played the only card in his hand, not blindly, but by instinct and without hesitation. But while he had apparently gained his point, it had been borne to him gradually that his very method of play had lost him infinitely more than he had gained. In the mind of the

woman he desired he had transgressed the rules of the game, and the realisation maddened him. Never since then had he heard her name coupled with Harry Sevier's. Never had he seen them together. This had given him satisfaction. But if he had shattered her regard for the man whom he now hated more tenaciously than he had ever hated anything in his whole life, the fact had seemed to hold no advantage for himself. On several visits to the city, he had invented reasons to call at the Allen house, but he had soon learned that he was not to meet Echo there. He had, however, seen her elsewhere more than once — when her gaze had gone by him as if he had been empty air. Though his veins burned with the fever of the famished, he had not ventured to challenge that cold aloofness. But it had rankled and stung him almost beyond endurance, till he had come to thirst avidly for some kind of test between them — for action, whatever the result might mean. And the fierce desire that raged within him, feeding on itself, had left its sinister traces on his face.

Abruptly Craig withdrew his gaze. "I see young Sevier held forth last night. The last time I heard him was in court, just a year ago. The young fop! He'd do better to stick to his law-books — though I hear he has no cases anymore."

"It's his own choice," the attorney answered coldly. He liked Harry Sevier and he resented the other's tone, no less than the words. "He could

have a new client every day if he wanted. As a matter of fact he hasn't taken a case since the one you speak of. He fought for six months trying to get through an appeal on that. It was the first criminal case he had ever lost and it cut him up some, I fancy. Of course it's ridiculous to take it so to heart, but I swear I can't help liking him for it! He's not merely a fop, either. In my opinion he comes mighty near being just what that crowd at the Civic Club have been looking for."

Craig's eyes had not left Treadwell's. "In what way?" he asked.

"As a spokesman. They know what they believe and what they want to fight for. But they've been inarticulate. Most of them are blue-blooded old fogies, with their souls full of fine ideals, but with no leader. In him (and in that speech of his last night he threw in his lot with them absolutely) they have a finely trained legal mind — for with all his old fire-works Sevier always had that — and a natural orator besides. You should have heard him last night! For two hours he held that great audience in a perfect spell. 'The finest exhibition of southern oratory since the war' the papers called it this morning, and I tell you, Craig, they weren't far wrong!"

He stopped, somewhat embarrassed by his own enthusiasm, and wondering at the dark look on the other's face. Perhaps to hide this, Craig turned away. His fingers were twitching and for an in-

stant he was not wholly master of himself. When he spoke, however, he had regained his governance.

"After all, it wasn't the future of this anti-machine campaign that I came to talk about. There's something nearer home that is worrying me."

"What's the trouble?"

"The Welles-Scott case decision. It is to be handed down on the first of May. It must be in our favour."

The other looked surprised. "But surely it will be."

"It's not on the cards. I thought I knew the Judge, but there are signs that I'm afraid of."

The attorney sniffed incredulously. "Judge Allen!" he exclaimed. "Why, the trust made him. And it keeps him made, I should think, too."

Craig shook his head. "He's been talking lately. We've had warnings from some who are very close to him. This decision *must* be what we want it to be. Voters are thinking more than they used to. If these Civic Club people keep up the agitation — particularly if they link on to the prohibition movement, as they are likely to do — the distillery may become a live issue in the next state campaign. That's the great danger. And this Welles-Scott case strikes at the heart of the matter. If the Trust loses this decision it will be the signal for a crop of bills in the next legislature that will cost us a cool million to fight. And they may lead anywhere. I tell you we *have* to have it!"

The other mused a moment. "The Judge, of course, can't be reached in — in ordinary ways."

"Of course not. He's not venal. We've been able to depend on him so long because he has grown up with the Trust — he was its counsel for many years — and its interests were his. He *thought* with it. His mind ran in the same groove. But Beverly Allen, the Trust's counsel, and Judge Allen of the Supreme Court are different propositions. I always thought this test case was a mistake! But I was overruled. Well, we've got to have the decision. If one way won't bring it about, another shall. Something will have to — persuade him. He must have a weak spot. We must find it, that's all."

"His life's been an open book, if that's what you mean," said the attorney, slowly.

"Few men's life are open books," returned Craig, with cynical shortness, "There's apt to be a page pasted down somewhere. That part of it is your business. If there's any such page in his case, you find it! I don't care how small a page it is, or how long ago it was pasted down. If it's there I want it!"

"His record was combed with a fine-tooth comb when he went on the bench," said Treadwell. "The Trust wanted a man that the opposition couldn't get anything on. That was before your time, of course. I went over the report myself. There wasn't anything there — nothing but the vaguest suspicion of an old love affair that was polished off twenty years ago."

Craig turned sharply. "A love affair! After his marriage?"

"Why yes, I think so. But there weren't any details. And the woman died abroad long ago."

"What was her name?"

Treadwell looked at him curiously. A faint flush had crept over his face. "See here, Craig," he said, "after all, there's a limit to decency. At the most it was nothing but a passing infatuation — an innocent one. There was not the faintest breath of scandal. And as I told you, the woman is dead."

Craig's eyes were boring into him. "Treadwell," he said in a hard voice, "you don't seem to understand. This is a big game, and there is no limit! None! And I intend to win it! *What was her name?*"

The other leaned to knock the ash from his segar. There was a tense pause before he replied. "I have forgotten."

"Where are the old reports?"

"They were destroyed."

Craig looked at him an instant, his eyes like sparkling points of steel. He opened his lips to speak, but he did not. Instead, with a shrug of incredulous contempt, he caught up his hat, turned to the door, opened it and went out.

Treadwell listened to the heavy footsteps descending the stair. Then he went and shut the door.

"The hound!" he said under his breath.

CHAPTER XI

CRAIG FINDS HIS WEAPON

FROM his chair in the library at Midfields that night, just beyond the circle of radiance cast by the big reading-lamp, Cameron Craig looked steadily at the Judge from under his bushy eyebrows, as the latter said:

"Yes, it is true that I was for years affiliated with the interests you represent. I was their attorney. The connection ceased when I, myself, severed it, eleven years ago."

Craig's lips, that had been set in a hard line, parted in a satiric smile. He was leading doggedly up to what he purposed to say. "To its profound loss," he said from the shadow. "You had cogent reasons, no doubt."

The other mused a moment, his pallid, scholarly face averted. "I'll tell you, if you like," he said at length. "But you will understand that I challenge no one else's convictions. I assume to sit in judgment only upon my own."

Craig nodded. "Of course."

"I made the connection we are speaking of," continued the Judge, "when I was a young man, just beginning practice. The liquor problem was young then too. Communities did not take it too seriously.

— particularly in the south where drinking was a matter of course with gentlemen. The white-ribbon movement was in its infancy and John B. Gough had hardly been heard of. To me — to the men I knew — the ‘temperance’ agitation seemed a mere recurring fad, fostered by pious and well-meaning persons, which cropped up — a kind of moral seven-year locust — at periodic intervals. People lived more or less as their grandfathers had lived before them on their plantations. And their fathers had been fox-hunting, hard-living ‘three-bottle men’ right down to the war. I had all the habits and prejudices of my class. Liquor seemed to me like many another thing that was made to minister to individual weakness, but was not in itself obnoxious. And the decanter was never empty on my side-board. Yet even then the new element in politics and in every-day life — the sentiment against liquor — was growing. Times were slowly changing, men’s outlook was changing, and I knew — long before I admitted it to myself — that I was a part of an industry which the best thought of the community no longer approved, and that men who championed it were swimming against a deepening and strengthening social current. I was stubborn, but at last there came a day when I — changed too.”

His voice had softened, had suddenly become surcharged with feeling. He leaned over the table and caught up a small oval photograph, set in a black-leathern frame. It was a picture of his son

Chisholm, as a boy of perhaps fourteen. He held it out in a hand that slightly trembled:

"That is why I changed, Craig. One night Chilly came home — drunk. I had never seen him intoxicated, had never guessed that he could so far forget himself. He was a mere boy, at school! In that moment the sharp truth came to me. Shame stared at me from my own door-step. I saw the text of the sermon that had been preached into my deaf ears — in my own son!"

He broke off abruptly and set the picture back on the table. When he spoke again his voice was more even:

"That hour, as I sat here in this same room, I — saw. Could anything else have opened my eyes? Perhaps not. But that did. I saw all at once what I had been bolstering. It was no longer a theoretical question of the harm of the club-bar and the corner saloon to the community. They were making a drunkard of *Chilly*! The Trust furnished their stock-in-trade. And I had been the Trust's paid tool — a part of its brain in this state — had guarded it from error, shown how far it could go with impunity under the law, had even made possible its organisation as it exists to-day! I, Chilly's father! That night I wrote out my resignation as counsel. I mailed it before I slept."

There was a slight pause. Craig's lowering look had been watching the other curiously. The emo-

tion in the older man's voice had touched no chord of response in him. Rather it roused contempt — not for the son, whom he considered a brainless weakling, but for what seemed to him an arrant attempt to evade the issue that stood so sharply and insistently in his own mind. To him no man's motives were pure. The man before him had been not the Trust's servant, but its creature. Had not the Corporation, behind all, set him on his high seat? Was he fool enough to think that he — Craig — was not aware of that? It had expected him to pay in kind, when the need arose, as now it had. And did the other think to throw dust in his eyes with such mawkish sentimentalism — to evade this old tacit obligation by a flimsy pretence of moral scruple? Craig spoke:

“And — the Corporation. What did it say? Eh?”

“The president of the board came to see me. He was good enough to ask me to reconsider. But I had made my choice.”

Craig leaned forward, his arm on the little inlaid desk beside him. “Let me finish,” he said with deliberate meaning. “The board, accepting that decision with the keenest regret, desired to make your retirement the occasion for showing in a tangible way its appreciation of your long and faithful service. A seat on the Supreme Bench being vacant, the Directorate proposed, unless your taste pointed

otherwise, to use such influence as it might possess, to gain for your name the consideration in that connection which it deserved."

A look of surprise had crossed the Judge's face as he began. A sensitive flush swept it as he ended. "If you imply that my seat was offered me, Mr. Craig, even tentatively, at that time, or in that connection, you are in error!"

Craig's sneer was open now. There was no more pretence. "If not in so many words, in effect! Pshaw! Do you mean to pretend you would have had that appointment if the Trust hadn't backed you for it? It owned the state bag and baggage then, as it does now — and as it will continue to do! It put you on the Bench and it has kept you there, and you know it!"

The Judge was on his feet now, his flush faded to pallor. He deigned no answer to the flung assertion. "What is your object in coming to me to say this?" His voice was deep and resonant.

"Just this!" Craig lifted his arm, his big fist clenched, his eyes narrowed. "You were the Trust's counsel and confidant for twenty years — till it put you where you are now! Do you think it did that for nothing? It *made* you, Beverly Allen! And now it has reason to believe that you intend to knife it in the back — to drag the ermine it put on your shoulders into an incendiary hue-and-cry started by demagogues who aim to destroy a great industry!"

"What do you mean, sir?" The Judge's tone was icy.

"I mean the Welles-Scott decision!" Craig said in a low, deadly voice. "That"—his clenched hand smote the light desk at his elbow with a savage blow—"must be *ours!*"

For an instant there was blank silence. The Judge stood aghast, his very speech frozen with indignation. To him his judicial calling had an element that was almost sacred. This man—to whom he had given the hand of friendship, who had the *entrée* into the exclusive circles of southern gentility—this man assumed to lay coarse fingers upon his vestment of office, to question his integrity as a Judge! He dared to believe him, Beverly Allen, cheaply venal—a puppet, whose legal rulings were at the beck and call of corporate influence! The room seemed suddenly stifling hot. He turned to the window, flung the curtains wide and drew a gulping breath of the fresh air.

He had not seen Craig's sudden start. For at the smashing blow of his fist on the fragile Italian desk, a curious thing had happened. Its catch loosened by the jar, a tiny carven panel had fallen with a little click, and a thin sheaf of yellowed letters had dropped and spread fan-wise beside his hand. The backs of the envelopes were uppermost, and across the top one was written in a dim, twirly hand and faded ink, the initials *B. A.*

A thought darted like cold lightning through

Craig's brain. "B. A."—Beverly Allen! Whose were those old letters? The initials were in a woman's hand. What if they held a clue to the old story Treadwell, his attorney, had spoken of? A quick instinct inspired him. His hand closed over them quickly — went to his breast — as the Judge turned from the window.

The latter had regained self-control. He stood erect and tall, his leonine head thrown back, his eyes shining, and in his face a look the other had never seen in it before. "You have presumed," he said, "to say to me what I would not have believed any representative of your corporation would dare to say. And you have taken advantage of my hospitality to say it in my own house. I choose now to believe this message an individual one, springing from a personal and base initiative rather than from the responsible Directorate which I once served. 'Once,' I say. For I serve it no longer. I am now a member of the Judiciary of this commonwealth. Because the corporation furthered my candidacy, you assume that it 'made' me. Perhaps it did. But it never owned my conscience or my integrity! Nor does it now, thank God!"

As he spoke he had stepped to the wall and pushed a bell. "Nelson," he said, to the entering butler, "show this gentleman to the door."

Craig had risen to his feet. He looked at the other an instant with livid face. Then he went

rapidly to the hall and snatched up his hat and stick. The outer door closed heavily behind him.

In his room at the hotel Cameron Craig took the sheaf of letters. Under the electric-light he drew the folded leaves one by one from their worn envelopes and spread them open before him. A look of chagrin crossed his face. No woman had written them; they had been penned by the Judge himself — he was familiar with the heavy, characteristic hand-writing. Were they, then, only some old letters to his wife, perhaps? He was holding one leaf to the light. Suddenly his eye caught. He made an exclamation. His face lighted with amaze and savage exultation.

What a weapon blind luck, ironic fate, had put into his hands, in the very face of the man for whom he had craved it! For on that leaf, etched in remorseless ink, was what would open an old grave, drag into the daylight the corpse of an ignoble passion, cast scorn upon the writer's name and blight and wither present and future! How little, after all, the tricks of the body changed! Twenty years — and yet, *his letter!*

What matter when it had been penned, or whether the woman were long dead to whom he had once written that blazing indiscretion? He, the jurist of spotless living and good repute — to be shown forth to the world as a moral fraud, a husband and father who had once stood shamelessly ready to

fling home and reputation on the scrap-heap in a disgraceful flight "without benefit of clergy!" The woman presumably had scorned his offer — since she had sent him back his letters — and yet on the page still stood the black intention, in black and white! What incredible folly had led him to preserve it? Twenty years ago — in the dead past — and yet there it was, to be used in the living present, the blunt handwriting, recognisable at a glance, damning and beyond denial!

He laughed aloud. It was Echo's father whom he held in his hand! If he did not come to terms, so much the better, since the blow would strike her too. She thought herself above him, did she? What if this story should be spread abroad in yellow headlines, babbled of in club and boudoir, smirked at on street-corners? Would she hold herself so high then? Well, if he was so far beneath her pride, that should bring her to his level! He felt no prick of shame at the base move he contemplated, no smart of pity for the ruin it should bring. Ambition in which was no tincture of honourable scruple wove, with the desire to humble the woman who would have none of him, to a resolution as unyielding as steel.

He gathered up the letters and put them carefully into his pocket. In another hour he was on the train, speeding to his home in the next state.

CHAPTER XII

A HOSTAGE TO THE BOTTLE

THE speech of the day before of which Treadwell had spoken so enthusiastically to Cameron Craig, had indeed given to the crowd, which had been wont on past occasions to gather at the old court-house when he spoke, another revelation of Harry Sevier. It had been impromptu — not the outgrowth of deliberate plan. The non-appearance of a much-heralded speaker had thrust the exigency upon him without warning, and he had acquiesced only in a keen desire to save from blank failure a meeting in whose principles and object he was by his very character deeply interested. The tortuous involutions of local politics had never interested him, but he had thrilled to the stirring beneath the surface of the great forces of good and evil and the present agitation for clean government had found him enrolled, without question, on its side.

As he stepped forward to face the great curtain of faces that stretched outward and upward beyond the footlights, he had not known what he should say. Indeed, while he slowly "felt" his audience in his opening sentences, the sub-conscious part of his mind had been full of a matter foreign to the subject at hand. There had come to him a fleeting recollec-

tion of the last time he had spoken in public — the day upon which he had betrayed his client and put a man, of whose innocence an instinct deeper-rooted than reason had convinced him, into the striped habiliments of the convict. The sharp, aching compunction of that thought had never left him. Since that day, though he went daily to his sumptuous office, he had taken no new case. He had gone always with that sin clanking against his conscience and the memory of the trial had focused always in that glimpse, across the mass of faces, of a woman's look of puzzle and hurt. During the months since then that face had hung before his fevered vision as a far, cool oasis to the desert wayfarer. These had been black months of fierce, untiring battle with the appetite to which he had surrendered himself, and which he had sworn to conquer. There had been times when the avid thirst had seized him by the throat, when endurance had almost failed: days when he had sat in his inner office, with door locked and blinds down, fighting desperately with the strenuous impulse that seemed to be dragging him bodily, as if with fleshly hands, to the little wall-cabinet whose door had never been unlocked since the day of that sinister court-recess.

During this prolonged, grappling struggle he had never been to Midfields. He had seen Echo but occasionally, walking or driving on the street, or less frequently at functions from which he could not absent himself without remark. There had been no

confidences between them. Never had he leaned to her to whisper: "You see! Do I do well?" Never had her lips said, "I know . . . I know, and I am watching!" yet his heart had told him that she was alive to the issue, that she felt the forces conflicting for the mastery. She had not been in the audience on this day, but as the faces pulsed and receded till they wove into a grey blur in the misty blaze of the incandescents, Harry's inner vision had a swift memory of her face as it had looked in that old court-house scene.

And with it, as though it had been a key to the disused mental machinery, strangely and wonderfully there had come back to him, in a sudden flashing illumination like summer lightning, a surging return of the old power, the vivid rush of lambent images in his brain and the burning, insistent phrase to his tongue — the power that he had thought gone forever with that shuddering failure of a year before.

As he felt again the old native ability rising in him, strong and undismayed, and once more *his own*, without hostage given to the bottle, a stinging delight had swept through him. It was the fruit of victory, and fiercely sweet in proportion to the bitterness of the struggle. Yet in his new sensitiveness the realisation had held a flicker of self-shame. Never in those old days had he employed that talent for the greater good: only for individual ambition, often for the blunt defeating of the clear ends of justice! It was another Harry Sevier who spoke

now, one to whom conscience now stood as mentor, to whom principle was become a guiding star. The leashed power and restraint had been bred of that long struggle, and from the fresh mastery of self which he had so hardly gained, flowed forth a subtle magnetic quality that held his listeners mute. In the hush that wrapped the great assemblage the speaker of the day, late by an hour, had entered the back of the stage, to wave back the nonplussed chairman and to seat himself in the rear, enthralled by the white magic that swayed all alike. The speech had held no rodomontade, none of the pyrotechnics that had lent a flavour of sensation to past court trials. It had been on a higher plane than appeal to superficial feeling or ingrained prejudice. It had brought no accusation, pointed no finger, save backward to old ideals of community respect, and forward to the wave of independent thought that was sweeping over sister states to break in thundering force upon the crags of misrule.

It had closed in a note of hope and of promise, and ended with the hall hushed in that greatest tribute to true oratory — absolute silence.

Next day, wherever men congregated in the little capital, Harry Sevier's name was on every lip. It was flung wide, too, in newspaper headlines until the ripple stirred far borders. Of this he himself could not be unaware. He knew that never in the old days had he spoken as he had spoken then. He was conscious also that in the trial of himself his facul-

ties had been reorganised and renewed, had emerged sounder and truer from the strenuous testing, and that the fire through which he had passed had burned away the rubble and left metal that was more worthy. Nor could he fail to realise that at a single step he had attained to a new and unfamiliar status in the community. He felt this not so much in the multiple congratulations of the many, as in a certain new deference that he distinguished in more reserved greetings.

Beneath all, however, but one opinion profoundly concerned him — Echo's. As he swung along the street this afternoon, the thought of her excluded all others.

Rounding the corner, a voice came to him — a ribald, good-humoured voice, inviting some one to "come and have a drink." He turned abruptly. Chisholm Allen stood a little way from him, before a swing-door through which sifted the clink of glasses and boisterous conversation.

Chilly was decidedly the worse for wear. Much water had run under the bridges since he had tussled with old Nelson, the butler, over the decanter of sherry. His face was pallid and the marks of incorrigible weakness and self-indulgence showed clearly through its habitual good-nature. Chilly's feet were set in the paths of dalliance and he had ceased to care if anybody knew it. He greeted the newcomer, however, with a trace of embarrassment which he dissipated with a laugh, as he said:

"The invitation's for you, if you like, Harry. We'll have one to the silver-tongued orator! What do you say?"

For answer Harry linked an arm in his and turned him down the street — away from the swing-door. "Come up to my rooms, Chilly, it's cool there and we haven't had a talk for a blue moon. No, we'll consider the drink afterward."

Just at the moment a carriage and pair bowled by them. It was drawn by the Allens' bays and Echo was on the rear seat. She had seen the action, had caught its import, and Harry had a flashing glance from her dark eyes that sent the blood coursing to his fingers. Chilly too, however, had seen the swift exchange. He frowned, then laughed again.

"You should join the Salvation Army," he said, satirically. "They've a rescue corps, I believe. I know a pretty ensign, and she shall come and pin a nice little medal on your manly chest!"

Harry smiled without resentment. "The Army might not be so bad; it's an outdoor life at any rate. You'd be better for more of that."

"I believe you," said Chilly lugubriously. "It's getting impossible indoors. Nothing doing but moral lectures nowadays. If it weren't for the Duchess I'd cut it."

"For 'somewhere east of Suez, where a man can raise a thirst'?" quoted the other mildly. "Travel is expensive, Chilly."

"Yes, confound it," was the reply. "So is the thirst. The old man only allows me fifty dollars a month and I've stuck up every bar in town to the limit."

A frown was on Harry's brow. A year ago this youth had confined his daily potations to the club, and his drinking-bouts to that sequestered resort, "The Springs." Now he drank openly in corner saloons — he, the son of a southern gentleman, a member of the Supreme Bench, whose forebears had been courtly and clean-living from the days of the Colony! They had turned into the apartment-building now, and a moment later were in Harry's sitting-room, whose windows opened upon a square musical with lipping leaves and the cool splash of a fountain.

It was an apartment that bespoke a keen though sober artistic taste: grey walls with violet silk curtains at the deep windows and two or three old paintings — among these, set on an easel, a Greuze that he had unearthed in a cobwebbed curio-shop in Italy — a plain desk with a strip of dull-coloured damask whose quaint Russian needle-work set off a few books in tooled leather — a square piano of Circassian walnut spread with an old brocade, against which a bowl of peonies splashed their fleshy crimson — and deep, comfortable chairs. Into one of these Chilly threw himself.

"Well," he said, "here we are, as per schedule. So trot out your drink."

"It was that I wanted to talk to you about. I think you know I'm your friend, Chilly, and what I say I say as a friend. Whisky is getting the better of you."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Chilly, easily. "You weren't always so mighty particular. When did you climb onto the water-wagon, I'd like to know?"

"When I found I was better off there. I haven't touched liquor for a year. Take my advice, Chilly — it's sound! — and try to cut the drink out. It's doing you harm."

Chilly laughed. "That seems to be the signal all along the line!" he said humorously. "But what's the good? I could knock off any time I chose, just as well as you. But I don't intend to do it yet awhile. I like it."

There was a tentative knock at the door. It opened and a girl's piquant face peered in. "Chisholm Allen!" said Nancy Langham's indignant voice. "Have you forgotten you have an engagement to take me to the kennels this afternoon?"

Chilly sprang forward and seized her small gloved hands. "Come in," he said. "There's nobody here but Harry and me. Please do, Nancy."

"Oh, I mustn't!" She turned to the latter. "You see I needed Chilly so *tremendously*, and Echo told me she saw him with you. I expected to meet him on the way. Then I thought I'd just ring and ask for him, only the hall door was open. Chilly,

you're outrageously undependable. You *know* I wanted to get that dog to-day, because I'm going to leave for home to-morrow, and you do know more about dogs than any one else."

Chilly looked a little shame-faced. "I forgot all about it, Nancy. Honestly, I did."

She sighed. "That's the fact, no doubt, but it's not one bit complimentary. You're so dreadfully truthful, Chilly! Come along now, or we'll be too late."

"All right," he answered, drawing her inside the door. "Just a minute. Harry's going to give me a drink. Weren't you, Harry, eh?"

For answer the other pressed a button and a trim silk-robed Japanese came noiselessly from the next room. "Fetch a bottle of Evien, Suzuki," he said, "and some glasses. Have it cold, please."

Chilly stared. "Mineral water!" he exclaimed with sulky discomfiture. "My word! This is no signal for the H₂O. I'm *dry*!"

Harry shook his head. "I'm sorry, but it's a rule of my house."

Chilly shrugged. For an instant a little sneer drew down his lips, irritation fighting with his seldom-failing good-humour. He turned to the square piano, sat down on its stool, and ran his fingers up and down the ivory keys.

"I'll return good for evil," he said. "Before we go I'll give you a little ballad I've just composed.

112 THE LONG LANE'S TURNING

It's bound to make a great hit when it strikes the
Barbary Coast. He struck a resounding chord, and
with a wink at Harry, began to sing:

" The rounder swore at his barroom score
'Ere he called for a last, long bottle,
And proceeded to tint, without any stint,
His nose with a mellow mottle.
Then he climbed on a chair and hiccoughed long
And loudly he sang this funny old song:

" ' Money is dross,
Loving is loss,
There's never a crown that is worth its cross!
Life is a toss,
Dying is moss,
But booze — Oh, bully old booze, is boss! ' "

There was something of whimsical fun, yet of
bitter recklessness in the spectacle. Without techni-
cal training, Chilly had music in his finger-tips and
a fair baritone voice. The fingers wavered now and
then and the voice was shaken a little, but it was
full of magnetism, as, swaying lightly on the stool,
he rolled out the slangy doggerel with all the unc-
tion of a music-hall artist:

" Then the mixer laughed till the cat went daft
And the roof clanged all its gutters,
While the loungers yelled with mirth unquelled
Till they shook the very shutters;
And a sweet-faced devil peeped over the steins
And merrily carolled the lilting lines:

“ ‘ Money is dross,
Loving is loss,
There's never a crown that is worth its cross.
Life is a toss,
Dying is moss,
But booze — Oh, bully old booze, is boss! ’ ”

Harry's nerves were on edge. It was not the cheap vulgarity of the jingle nor the patent swagger of the performer, but the under-suggestion of the picture. The edge of this qualm had touched him on the street, with the odour of Chilly's breath and the moist tang of hops that had floated through the swinging-door. Now he felt a sudden anger that the coarse picturing and the tinkling keys had power to call up, even for an instant, the old slinking, craving ache in his throat.

Chilly swung round and got up laughing. “ Pretty good, eh, what? ” he said. “ Come along, Nancy; we'll go and pick out that dog! So long, Harry.”

Harry opened the door for them. He did not trust himself to speak. As Nancy's hand lay an instant in his on the threshold, a wave of sudden pity engulfed him. Her cheeks were mist-pale and her girlish lips were trembling.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HEART OF A MAN

AN hour later Harry sat in the same pleasant room, looking out where curdled clouds set their silver sails in the pale shimmer of sky. A light breeze fluttered the figured-silk curtains, a blue-bottle buzzed tentatively to and fro outside, and birds were fluting in the trees of the small park and splashing joyously in the fountain.

The encounter with Chilly had broken into his mood, which had been occupied with more inviting things. Now, alone, the thought of what this day held for him absorbed him. "One year!" he had said to himself on the day of that old court-house trial. "That is the test I will give myself. It is enough. If I can beat the brandy for a year, I can beat it forever!" To-day was an anniversary; this afternoon the year was up. The period had called up all his courage, had searched out with prying fingers every crevice of weakness, explored insistently each avenue of uncontrol. But he had won the long battle, and the resurgence of the old power that had come to him in his yesterday's speech had crowned the victory with confidence. Yesterday he would have died sooner than to have wrung

from his lips what he should say to her — to Echo — to-day!

When the tall old clock in the corner next chimed he rose and called, "Suzuki!"

The Japanese servant of spotless raiment entered with noiseless footsteps.

"Tell Aunt Judy I sha'n't want dinner to-night," said Sevier; "I'll dine at the club. You can take the night off, if you like; I'll let myself in."

"*Hai-e!*" Suzuki sucked in his breath and his oval eyes allowed themselves a gleam of satisfaction. As he brought his master's hat and stick Harry looked at him meditatively, wondering, as he had wondered a thousand times, what lay behind that secret-keeping, brown face with its perpetual, half-smiling gravity. He had picked him up a half-dozen years before in his travels, a shabby and abject adventurer with an English dialect that was fearfully and wonderfully made; and the youthful flotsam had speedily and without apparent tuition blossomed forth into that inestimable jewel, a perfect valet. With Aunt Judy the cook, who had been a servant of his father's, Bob the chauffeur who was her son, and Suzuki, Harry's bachelor *ménage* in the city stood a model of its kind, and the despair of his associates.

Harry walked slowly along the street clanging with cars, on pavements busy and sunny at first and giving place gradually to wedges of lawn and stretches of deserted foliaged flagging as he ap-

proached the suburbs. At the big gate of Midfields he lifted his eyes. Mrs. Allen was just stepping from her electric at the curb, cool and statuesque and smiling.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she said. "I really believe you were counting the flag-stones. I hope you were coming in — you've been shamefully oblivious of our pleasure this season!"

"I've been oblivious of my own," he countered, opening the gate for her. "But I'm going to make amends in future."

They walked leisurely up the drive under the acacias, chatting. She had often wondered, in the old days, whether there were not some understanding between him and Echo, and his long absence had puzzled her. But he had apparently gone nowhere else, and she welcomed his return. He was a distinctly eligible *parti*, and Echo had reached a point where the future was a pertinent thing. There had never been between the mother and daughter that close *rapprochement* which existed between daughter and father; Mrs. Allen had never felt that she understood Echo. She had never known for her, even as a child, the fierce and excluding yearning which she had lavished on Chisholm, and which had grown even stronger with the latter's increasing years and delinquencies. But she had Echo's interests thoroughly at heart, and Harry Sevier — particularly since his speech at the Opera House — had attained to importance in her worldly estimation.

"I haven't congratulated you," she said presently. "Your speech! It was a masterly thing."

"You were there? I'm glad I didn't know it. It would have deepened the blueness of my funk."

"Flatterer!" She tapped him on the arm with her parasol. "But I'm not wholly pleased, I assure you. The headlines are prophetic, I'm afraid. Presently the politicians will seize upon you, and the first we know you will be in Congress — or the Senate — and the town will have lost you. That's the way it goes!"

"Ah," he said, shaking his head, "who is the flatterer now?"

They had reached the big porch and she drew him into the hall and to the blue parlour, where the Judge sat with Echo, leisurely munching toast. "I've brought Mr. Sevier," she announced, "with his laurels thick upon him, just in time for tea. For my part, I am a wreck from the sun and I shall take mine in my room. But you'll come soon again, won't you?"

She passed out, faintly smiling and leaving a perfume of heliotrope behind her, without waiting Harry's answer, which seemed indeed to be given to Echo, since his hand held hers at the moment and his eyes were on her face. The sight for him had blotted everything else. The restful room with its cool shadows, the Judge — all seemed to retire into an inextinguishable and meaningless background, leaving only them two, together. In the year past

he had never been so near her; now he marked that while her hair had the same familiar whorl and golden under-lights, her face seemed more serious than of old, her eyes deeper and more wistful.

Since that far-away evening at the Country Club, Echo had passed through a confusion of experiences, the more trying as they had been locked in her own breast. It had been more than Harry Sevier: it was her love for him that had been fought over during that long year. When he had left her that night with his kiss burning on her hand, she had known instinctively that he had gone to do battle. What she had said had stung him deeply, yet she could not have recalled a word. It had been the cry of wounded pride, of stricken ideals, of reproach, of protest against the dominancy of the thing she hated over the man she loved. As the long months of autumn and winter wore away she had seemed, with a singular clarity of vision, to see his temptation and to enter spiritually into his struggle. They had met only a few times and then in public places and more than once her eye had distinguished the traces of the conflict. Something deep in her had told her that when he came to her again that conflict would be ended. So, at sight of him on the threshold, Echo's heart had leaped into turbulent beating. Here, at last, they were face to face — it was the closure of the past, the burgeoning of the new!

There was a desultory conversation over the tea, and then the Judge went back to his chair in the

library, and they two strayed out through the open French-window to the wide porch. There, on the top step, she sat down, leaning back against one of the big columns, up which a crimson Rambler climbed. He sat lower, at her feet. The smile had faded from both their faces, and a rose that was on her breast, from the tumult of her heart, showered its petals on the stone. He could see the old sun-dial gleaming from its tangle of ivy. He knew its quaint motto:

*Hours fly, flowers die.
New men, new ways,
Pass by;
Love stays.*

After a silence he lifted his gaze.

"You didn't think," he said in a low voice, "that I stayed away because I — because that same thing had ever happened since the day of the trial?"

"No," she answered, gently, "I knew it hadn't."

A uniformed imp on a bicycle — a postal messenger — careened wildly up the drive with a special delivery letter. They saw him deliver it to old Nelson at the side portico and pedal whistling down a by-path.

"Then," he said quickly, "you know now that it never can again? It has been a year, a round year to-day. I made up my mind that I would not come to you till the last day was out."

"I felt that, too," she said. "I knew what you

were thinking. I — I even guessed the year. Was it — so hard?"

"Yes," he answered. "But it would have been harder if I hadn't found it out when I did. The sting of all these months," he went on, "has been your thought of me! Every day, every hour, I have seen you as you looked that night at the 'Farm.' I shall never deserve that look again — Echo!"

She turned toward him at that, as if with a sudden impulse, her eyes like sapphire stars, her lips parted, but she did not speak. The failing sunlight spattered down through the moving foliage in green-gilt flashes that tinged her face and touched her hair with the soft burnish of Venetian gold, like that of a figure he remembered in St. Mark's. Behind her reared the seamed and grey old column — a faded background of age for a figure of immortal youth — and he knew suddenly that the picture of her, as he saw her at that moment, had covered forever the painful memory. There was only the ardent, unconditional now: only Echo and the dear old porch and the dimming daylight — and a bluebird singing from the heart of a tree — ever henceforward to be symbols to him of woman's love and — home!

He leaned toward her, his hand groping for hers, outstretched on the cool stone beside her, and said in a voice shaken, in spite of himself:

"Echo — it *is* just as it was a year ago, isn't it?"

She caught her hand — the one he groped for — to her cheek. She rose, and for an instant it seemed

as if she had not heard. Then her glance wavered and fell and a bright, rich colour stained her cheeks like a sudden flush of rosy sun-set. But she had slightly turned away and he did not see it.

"Ah!" he said, looking up at her. "I may say it now — may I not? — what you must have known all along. I love you, I love you! Only you and your love, dear — that is all I ask of God! . . . Echo —"

There was a sudden sound behind them, a hoarse cry from the room they had left. Both turned sharply toward the French-window. Then she was down the long porch like a flying shadow.

He followed, to find her bending over the form of her father, slipped sideways on the leathern sofa, his face bluish-white and a paper crumpled in his rigid hand. At the same moment Nelson thrust his woolly head through the rear door.

"Quick!" she cried, kneeling beside the couch. "He has fainted. Call mother." He went, his aged features twitching with fright.

"I will send Doctor Southall," said Harry quickly. He touched her hand, and with a single backward look at her, hurried out. She heard his step speeding down the gravel drive.

Echo laid a tremulous hand upon her father's, and at the touch the tense fingers relaxed and a crumpled brown paper dropped from them. She snatched it up — was that what had made him faint? She spread it out: it was a photographic print, unmounted, of the last page of a letter, in his own

handwriting. Across the top was printed, in the purple, noncommittal lettering of a typewriter, "For possible release May 3rd."

Then as she gazed, over the agitation of her face grew a shocked bewilderment that rushed headlong to realisation. She started to her feet, and a vivid scarlet flooded her pale face from chin to brow, then slowly ebbed, leaving behind it a frozen anguish. The print fell from her hand. At the same moment the Judge stirred and opened his eyes. He saw her standing before him; knowledge slipped back.

"Echo —"

She turned swiftly. He had struggled to a sitting posture — his gaze fastened on the crumpled paper on the rug. A little spasm crossed his face. "Reach me that," he said.

She picked it up and laid it in his hand, and he put it into his pocket with shaking fingers. He passed his hand across his forehead. "Where's Sevier?" he asked dully.

"He went to send the doctor. We were on the porch and heard you cry out."

"Ah, yes, I — remember. I tried to call you. I lost track of things for a minute or two, I reckon, But it's nothing. I've had little spells like this before. I don't need Southall — send Nelson to tell him not to come. I'm all right."

Unheeding her protests, he rose and went to his chair, as Mrs. Allen, with unaccustomed agitation on her face, swept into the room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

LATE that night the Judge sat alone at his desk in the library. There was a faint pungent odour in the room and at his elbow sat an ash-tray on which was a little huddle of brown ashes — all that remained of the photograph whose arrival that afternoon had so disconcerted him. He sat like a stone image, staring out into the moonlighted garden, but really seeing nothing beyond the range of the poisonous ashes at his side, save a green-and-yellow blur that might have been blent of leaves and moonshine.

He was looking at the Handwriting on the Wall.

All of his early life had been impeccable, all save that single lapse — that “brain-storm” which had convulsed the deep and quiet waters of his nature. It had come and gone with fateful swiftness, and out of the bitterness of the tragic awakening had grown gradually — as a spotless lily springs from the silt — a flower of recompense, which, its roots in the turbid memory, had shed a subtle perfume on his later life. His steady-going career had been laurelled with place and honours, and in Echo he had found compensation for the empty and the missed. And now, after all the years, Fate grinned at him

like a gargoyle from the cloud, holding the thunderbolt to destroy him! Unless he paid the penalty — with his professional integrity!

The Judge knew all at once that in the Great Economy no act of life was lost. His had not been. It had only been covered. Somewhere that old leaf of scribbled paper had lain, inert but potential, waiting the turn of the wheel to bring it to light. By some satanic twist of circumstance it had come to the hands of his enemy — Craig was his enemy now — and in his hands it spelled his own ruin. What weapon was there to fight with? None. However dastard the act that spread it to the world, he would stand in the eyes of his fellow-men discredited, undermined, morally disestablished, stripped and naked of all those things which were the breath of his life. He thought of his wife — of Echo. For them humiliation, looks askance. His decision on the Welles-Scott case was ready, locked in his drawer — lacking only his signature writ at the bottom — the most vital and far-reaching decision of any he had rendered. On the first of May it was to be handed down. He remembered the typewritten line on the photograph: "May 3rd!" On that day he would be placarded in the public prints!

A hackneyed text flashed through his mind: "Be sure thy sin will find thee out." He had not sinned, as the world counted it, no. But chasing the first, a second text etched itself as swiftly: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The coils had woven inextricably, there was no gap in the meshes. Suppose he did this thing that Craig demanded, rewrote the decision, perjured himself. Right, by another judgment, would have its way in the end. The act would save him from shame — would save others as well. What did it matter? Would not such a solution be best for all concerned?

“Thou shalt not do evil that good may come!” — it was curious how the banal, forgotten texts started up, like Jack-in-boxes, from some boyhood covert of his brain! Not matter? Ah, how much it mattered! Escape by that road was impossible for him. And there was but one other road by which he could evade the issue.

He unlocked a desk-drawer and pushed aside its litter of papers. A small silver-mounted revolver lay there — pointing the one way out. He picked it up, his fingers shrinking at the chill of the cool metal, then laid it on the desk. He took a sheet of paper from its place and began to write: “Dear Echo —”

He started; no, that would not do. He began again: “Dear Charlotte and —”

He paused an instant and listened — his hearing had caught some sound above-stairs. It was not repeated and he bent his head again over the writing. But his fingers would not frame the words. He laid aside the pen. Better, after all, to go all silently, leaving behind him empty speculation, which

if painful at first, would become in time but a softened memory!

It was the opening of the door of Echo's room which he had heard. For hours she had lain sleepless, her brain throbbing, strange painful pictures flitting under her closed eyelids. Her home world, which had always seemed simple and uncomplex, even in its darker aspects, had suddenly become fateful and mysterious, a thing of secret depths and shaming, piteous revelations. Her own father's past had held a secret that would not bear the light! That he had loved another woman than her mother — afterward — that, though the thought was repellent, perhaps he could not have helped. But that he had ever, ever as a passing phase, yielded to an infatuation which had taken no thought of consequence or of convention smote her with a kind of terror. Now, through his own reckless act, he had become the prey of a shameless woman — of a blackmailer.

For that was what it seemed to her. It did not occur to her that his letter might have fallen into other hands. In her imagination, back of the situation stood the woman who had tempted him, almost to his complete undoing, in his youth, now — a very wanton! — holding out the badge of his indiscretion, for a price! The photograph had come to him with its blunt threat typed at the top: "For Possible Release May 3rd." Echo had seen the like many a time written upon her father's printer's-

proofs. It meant released for publication. His letter was to be spread broadcast — unless he met the demand! The hideous vulgarity of his predicament sent pulsing waves of shame and humiliation over her. It seemed suddenly that their conventional, well-ordered existence had dropped all at once into an unnatural and hateful environment, the murky, unredeemable atmosphere of the yellow-backed novel and the tawdry film-play. Thoughts such as these had fought with the acute sympathy that had all her life made her and her father in feeling wellnigh inseparable, stabbing her love with the reflection that his deepest heart had, after all, been locked from her.

Gradually, however, the sharper corrosive ache had dulled away, leaving an overmastering sense of his trouble. Since Nelson had helped him to his room after his fainting in the library, she had not seen him, for though he had with curious stubbornness, it had seemed to her, refused to have the doctor come, he had not appeared at dinner. She wondered whether he was now asleep, or lying wide-eyed, nursing thoughts like hers. Finally there had stolen over her an odd uneasiness, a thriving anxiety. That tenuous telegraphy whose laws evade analysis though its operations are familiar and which, ever since her childhood, had called from her a subconscious and involuntary response to his moods that had sometimes startled them both by its eerie suggestion, now flooded her mind with a sense of warn-

ing. She slipped out of bed to peer through the blind. She could see a window of the library: light was sifting from between its heavy curtains — her father was not in his room, then; he was there. She thrust her feet into worsted slippers, threw a *kimono* over her nightgown and ran quickly down the stair.

The light footfall, the whispering rustle, did not reach the Judge. He was unaware of the girl who had paused uncertainly on the threshold. His mind was arguing the final phase of his problem.

What he purposed would cut the Gordian knot, make plain-sailing for others, if not for himself. He would have rendered no decision on the crucial case. With his escape the problem would solve itself. Craig would have nothing to gain then in publishing the letter. "Why not?" he muttered. "It is justifiable — it is neither gross nor cowardly — to issue one's-self a ticket into the hereafter in order to avert shame from the innocent and secure peace to those one loves!" His wife was provided for. His elimination from her equation of life, he reflected with a tinge of bitterness, would not deeply disturb her even, centred existence. Echo, he thought likely, would marry Sevier. And Chilly — of what earthly use was his life to Chilly? "I will do it," he said to himself. He stretched out his hand — toward the silver-mounted revolver.

But he drew it back. A further clearer conception had come to him in that last instant to give him pause. What, after all, was he about to do? Him-

self aside, all that was dearest to him aside, was not the act he contemplated at bottom the murder of a principle, the betrayal of a trust that he held for the State? He was a public officer, who had taken oath in the presence of his associates worthily to execute the functions of his high office, to do justice and fear not. For him the sin of omission could be no less than the sin of commission. Would such a shifty suppression of his decision be one whit less a treason than the rendering of a mendacious one? Either equally besmirched his honour! Something deeper in him than dread of death, deeper even than his present fear of life, stirred and throbbed. No, whatever the outcome, no matter what it held for him and his, he must go through with it to the bitter end! He buried his face in his hands.

As he sat thus stirless, the sense came to him of another presence in the room. Another's breath seemed to enwrap the place with feeling. He turned his head and saw the figure in the doorway. "Echo!" he cried and rose to his feet.

She came to him quickly, a little diffidently. "I couldn't help it, dear! I felt you — worrying, and I had to come." Suddenly her eyes fell on the revolver on the desk. She sprang and snatched at it in panic. "That! Oh, not that! Not that!"

"I — it was in my drawer," he said. "Surely you —"

"Ah," she cried. "I know! You — you re-

ceived a letter this afternoon. It made you faint. You haven't been yourself since you read it. And now you —"

He drew a shaking hand across his eyes. "No, dear," he said more steadily. "It would not have been — what you think. There was a moment when — but it has gone, and forever." He took the revolver from her hand, returned it to the drawer and locked it. "There," he said, "I give you the key. It will not happen now." There was in his wailing speech a kind of hopeless acquiescence and finality.

Her heart was beating hard with a painful embarrassment. "Can you — can't you tell me what the letter was?"

He looked at her palely, his features working. She would have to know soon enough, yet he shrank with a fastidious pain from telling her. What would she think of him? "Twenty years ago," he said, "when I was a young man, I wrote an — an unwise letter. It — it had to do with some one who died the year it was written, but whose memory I — I treasure. The threat is made now to publish it, and this would — would shame and harm that memory and me."

"Some one who is dead?" she repeated bewildered. The picture her fancy had painted was fading out. "Then how —"

"The old letter has fallen into unfriendly hands."

"And it must come back to hurt you — to spoil your life now! Something written before I was



He turned his head and saw the figure in the doorway. "Echo!" he cried, and rose to his feet

born! It sha'n't! It sha'n't! She spoke with passionate abandon, her words struck out like fire from flint, from the horror of the knowledge that had sprung to her at sight of the gleaming thing at which she had snatched. "But you can pay the price, no matter how much it is! Take my pearls — my rings — my gowns."

He shook his head. "It's not money: what I am asked to pay is my honour. I am required to alter my judicial decision on the Welles-Scott case . . . to hand down a legal lie."

She looked at him with parted lips. "The Welles-Scott case!"

"Yes. Much hangs on this decision. The great corporate interests — but you would not understand."

She threw herself beside his chair and knelt close to him. A great compassion was welling up in her, mingling itself with deep anger at the cowardly attack upon him. She had known of such conscienceless warfare in political life — acts of "character assassins" which knew neither pity nor honourable scruple. "Who has the letter?" she asked.

"Cameron Craig. It came with his card."

She started violently. Cameron Craig! He who had once asked her to marry him, who had asserted his love for her — he, now bent on her father's ruin! She had a darting memory of that heavy, ruthless jaw, those lowering, determined eyes. Cameron Craig? She lifted a stricken face.

"You see!" he said. "I remember you once said to me that he was not 'one of us.' He isn't. That is why I know that he will stop at nothing. He will do what he threatens. There is no way out."

She rose to her feet. Her heart was beating so that her breath came with difficulty and a mist was before her eyes. "You will hand down the decision." It was a statement, not a question.

"God help me — I must!"

"When?"

"A week from to-day, as I have announced."

She leaned and put her arm about his neck, the key of the drawer still clenched in her cold hand, and kissed him on the forehead. Even in that numb moment she felt a certain pride that he, who had known a passing weakness, was yet, in this crucial moment, so strong.

"You must go back to bed now," he said, heavily. "You are going to your aunt's to-morrow, aren't you?"

She nodded, her cheek still against his. "I shall take the early train, before you are up. But I shall be back next day."

She withdrew her arms. "Good night," she half-whispered, then looked at the locked drawer. "You will not — you will not —"

"I promise," he said.

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

An instant later she was gone.

CHAPTER XV

THE ONLY WAY

AS Echo stood once more in the dim light of her blue-and-white room, it seemed to her to belong to some blithe past life which she had lived long ago and discarded — as if she were suddenly an intruder into the peace and quiet it enfolded. For though her hands were like ice, her veins were beating hot and her mind was filled with the heat of a fiery furnace.

Cameron Craig held her father's name, his career, his whole happiness, and that of them all — her mother, Chilly, herself — in his hand. His was the power to crush and to ban. This man had professed to love her. She remembered what he had said to her that day in the garden — a year ago: "Since I met you the whole world has been changing for me. . . . You have entered into my blood and my brain, and the want of you has coloured all I have thought and done . . . Echo, Echo!" The words seemed to wreath about her, to return to her in pelted reverberations from the wall. She could save the situation. She could marry Cameron Craig.

The weird thought had rushed through her like a

cold flame with the voicing of that name in the library. He would do it. More than the decision, more than any material ambition, he desired her. The letter — and the photographic plate — should be the price!

As she fought with herself through the long night hours, distraught yet tearless, it came to her with agonised reiteration that the resolve marked the end for her of all that makes life young. Up to a year ago she had been a girl; her deeper emotions had been unstirred, her soul unknown to herself. Only from the moment at the "Farm" when she had sent Harry Sevier from her to his battle with appetite, had she known the real meaning of life. Since then she had had the sweetness of learning love's unfolding in denial, and that very day it had come to fruition. Could it have been only that afternoon that the confession had trembled on his lips, when her heart had seemed to beat audibly, like little songs of joy? Now the cup was dashed from her lips. And he would never know — she could never tell him! That was the deep and piteous treason to which she must contribute!

She crept to the window and looked out over the garden, its elfish vapours dimly lighted by a thin, silver crescent-moon that seemed hanging like a gipsy ear-ring from a swarthy cloud. Below her the box-bordered paths showed in a sunken cross. The hemlock in its centre, with its triple spires, had been brought, a tiny seedling, by her great-great-grand-

mother from White Sulphur Springs, rooted in a gourd tied on the back of an old buff-coloured coach. The old lady's quaint portrait hung still in the dining-room, just above the diamond-leaded cabinet that held the tea-set of gold and lapis lazuli blue, from which Jefferson and Randolph had drunk, and her garlanded silver basket whose inscription read, "From a lover of fifty years to his bride."

Echo felt a little shiver in her heart, as painful contrasting pictures thronged before her disordered fancy — pictures of herself as Craig's wife. She saw herself, young in years but with sere joys and blasted ideals, all youth's impulses dead in her, the wife of a man whose bodily presence she loathed and whose character, even before this, she had detested. A chill passed through her, and she dropped the curtain and shut out the moonlight. But what if her father stood ruined, the mark of public pity and covert sneers? She thought of the pearl-handled revolver. He would have given his life to check-mate fate, if that had but been possible to him. And she was his daughter!

But to give *herself*, her body, her soul! To go to this man, to live with him, to bear his name — she shrank from the thought as at the touch of white-hot iron.

When the tiny ormolu clock on her dressing-table struck five she drew up the blind. Dawn, with its coral sandals, was tiptoeing over the garden, hanging

dew-diamonds on the rose-bushes, swinging her censer of multifold perfume to the waking flute of the birds. She bathed her face and smoothed her hair, then put on a dark travelling dress and packed a small bag, putting into it only linen and a few toilet-accessories, with a closed silver frame, heart-shaped, whose twin sides held miniatures of her father and mother. Last she unlocked a tin box in her drawer, took some money which it contained and put it in her pocket. Then, bag in hand, she went downstairs.

In the dining-room Nelson held up his hands, pink-lined palms outward.

"Mah Goodness, honey!" he ejaculated. "Reck'n yo' didn' sleep 'tall las' night, what wid Marse Beve'ly took so yistidy. Yo' look jes' lak er ghos'. Now yo' set down en drink some hot coffee en eat plenty chick'n en waffles. Ain' gwine find nuthin' *half* ez good on dat ar' dinin'-cyah, nohow!"

The warmth of the coffee was grateful to her, and while the old man hovered about her she made a pretence of eating, answering his protestations with monosyllables, in fact scarcely knowing what she said, for her mind was busy with other things. 'Lige, the driver, would wait to put her on the train — she must take the up-train then, as he expected her to do. And it was an express: she could not leave it till it reached the junction, hours later. There, however, she could take the other road — the Southern. There must be an afternoon train,

and that, though by a round-about way, would bring her finally to her destination.

When carriage-wheels sounded from the drive she went into the library and seated at her father's desk, wrote a note. It was to Harry Sevier. She sealed and addressed it with a hand that shook a little, and gave it to Nelson with instructions to send it during the morning. The old negro put her into the carriage, with her bag and tucked the cover about her with loving hands.

She caught a breath, uneven like a child's. "You'll — take good care of father, Nelson?"

"Bress yo' li'l ha'at, ah'm sho' gwine watch Marse Beve'ly lak er *hawk*. He'll be all right, en yo' be back termorrer."

"Yes," she said faintly.

As the carriage whirled into the roadway, she turned her head to cast a straining gaze up the silent drive to the old house. Then the acacias shut it from her view.

CHAPTER XVI

DERELICT

IN Harry Sevier's outer office his clerk glanced backward with a startled expression, his law-book dropping from his fingers. "That's queer," he muttered. "I never heard him laugh like that before. Doesn't sound like a joke, somehow."

He rose and tapped lightly on the inner door, which he had closed upon his employer a moment before. But there was no response and he went back to his seat — and the volume he was studying. "Wonder if it was that note I gave him," he speculated.

The tap had fallen on deaf ears. Harry was sitting in the other room, rigidly staring at the note in question. There was on him a feeling of actual physical sickness. He did not know that he had laughed. At last he rose, and crumpling the written sheet into a ball, laid it in the fire-place and struck a match. His fingers worked clumsily and he broke several short off before a flame showed and he stooped painfully and held the match to its edge. He remained in the crouching posture while the paper blazed merrily up. In the charring heat it crackled and opened, showing for a brief instant in the

baleful, blackening, light two sentences it had contained: "*Think as gently of me as you can. I can never marry you — never.*"

He stood up dazedly and groped his way to a chair. So this was the end! She, Echo, whom he had thought so true, she had been playing with him — and now the game was over. To her he had been only a puppet, a card in hand to be played off, discarded for the winning of the greater point. Poor, brainless, fool that he was! There was no longer a yesterday — no dear eyes holding his, no Eden wind blowing the rose-petals nor silver stars swinging the incense of the gods! He had been living in a fairy-tale, a castle in Spain, a fool's paradise, hugging a ridiculous dream, that had had no reality to her, had been but a chapter of coquetry, to which she now wrote *finis*! "*Think gently!*" This was the epitaph of her flirtation with Harry Sevier — flung away, raked under, thrust from sight, a thing for the scare-crow and the scavenger!

He got up and going slowly to the window, stood many minutes with his forehead against the pane.

What remained for him? To sweep out of his life the shards of that beautiful thing that lay destroyed forever? To saunter on, with hypocritical smirk and affected nonchalance, down the empty declivity of professional habit, to an undesirable goal? To what end? Of what value had been his striving? A year ago he might have won her — no one else had had more than a slight hold upon her then. It had

been that long denial that he had set himself that had undone him! What profit to him that he had won the mastery over himself, had cut the tentacle coils that were enwinding him? Of what had been the use?

There darted through his racked mind the sorry jingle that Chilly had once roared in his rooms:

“ Money is dross,
Loving is loss,
There's never a crown that is worth its cross.
Life is a toss,
Dying is moss,
But booze — Oh, bully old booze, is boss! ”

Why not “ cut it all,” as Chilly had longed to do? Plunge out along the numb, reckless way whose well-remembered mile-stones suddenly beckoned him — anyhow, anywhere, only to muffle the pain that plucked at him — to sodden and sink himself in blessed oblivion, like a stone in a pool!

A thing that had lain torpid and dormant in the dregs of his being thrust up its head. It was as though a chain snapped in his brain, and what had been shackled there reared, savage and exultant. On the desk sat a photograph in a silver frame. Once he had been used to turn this face-down when that cabinet was opened a year ago! He picked this up and with a sudden wrench of his powerful fingers bent and broke it across again and again, crushing metal and board into a shapeless battered twist, and flung it into the fireplace. He snatched up

a heavy paper-weight and with one blow smashed in the door of the little wall-cabinet. The glass fell in a shower of silvery tinkles to the floor. He seized the black bottle that sat there — with the rusty goblet — poured the latter to the brim and drank it off — once, twice, three times.

He went into the main office. Its occupant was on his feet in alarm at the crash of shattered glass in the next room. "How much money is there on the premises?"

The clerk looked in a drawer. "About sixty dollars. It's the last payment on —"

"Give it to me," said Sevier shortly. He pocketed the wad of bills the other handed him. "I'm going on a journey — abroad," he said. "I may be gone some time — in fact, I know I shall. Don't forward anything, and close up the office till I return. You will draw, as usual, of course." In another moment he was giving directions — over the complaisant wire — to his bank. He had always kept his leisure clear by putting the small details of daily routine book-keeping, as he expressed it "on the other fellow"; however long his desertion, rent and camp-followers should be paid with regularity.

Ten minutes later his valet, in a suit of spotless white linen, let him into his apartment.

"I'm off for a vacation, Suzuki," he said. "To-night, when Bob comes for orders, tell him to put the car up till I want it. You can go to night-school and rub up your 'Yingleesh.'"

The Japanese blinked. "A'right," he said. "When we see you some more?"

"When I get back." Sevier lifted a book from the table. "Take this to Mr. Treadwell's — his house, not his office — you understand. There's no message; it belongs to him. Don't wait; go at once."

When he had closed the outer door on the valet, Harry drew a long breath. He opened another door and listened. He could hear Aunt Judy rattling crockery in the kitchen, humming as she laboured. He would be undisturbed, the coast was clear. His veins were beating hot now with the brandy, and the sickness was gone. In the old days the reaction had been slow and grudging. But during the year his body had refreshed itself. The injured crust of usage was stripped away, and the physical side responded speedily.

He went into his dressing-room and threw open the huge walnut wardrobe that effaced one wall. It was hung from end to end with clothing. He selected a cheap dun-coloured suit which he had purchased abroad years before for a walking-tour, of whose strenuous occupations it showed some traces in wear, a flannel shirt and a slouch hat, companion of sundry long-ago fishing excursions. He took a nail-scissors and painstakingly cut from each article its maker's name. In the bath-room, first with shears and then with a razor, he cut off his crisp dark beard: never, since his college days abroad, had he seen his own face like that.

Finally arrayed, he regarded himself in the cheval-glass. The Harry Sevier of sumptuous apparel and perfect grooming, the familiar spirit of the place, was gone. In his stead there stood an unfamiliar presence, with smooth-shaven chin and knock-about clothing. And the stranger looked from the depths of the mirror with a gaze from which something tempered and remorseful had vanished, a gaze of avid recklessness and strange, irresponsible daring, the look of one standing on the sheer verge of any hazard, welcoming any throw of the dice, fearing nothing and caring nothing.

As he stood, his hand encountered a small hard object in his pocket. He drew it out. It was a ring, roughly made and holding an uncut emerald almost square in shape. He remembered that once, in the woods, he had bought it for a whim from some gipsy caravan — a luck ring. Much luck it had brought him! Well, it was the gipsy-road now for him. He drew off his seal ring and thrust the other on his finger in its place.

He went quickly out the front door and down to the entrance pulling his hat brim well over his eyes on issuing to the street. As he did so he grazed a lady leisurely passing. It was the plump and pretty Mrs. Spottiswoode. Her glance met his fairly, but there was no sign of recognition; she only drew her trim, modish skirt away from the contact as she passed on.

He walked more rapidly now. He could scarce

keep from running — would have done so but for the thronging crowds. The brandy he had drunk in the office had roused the devil of craving; it was in his throat now like the rasp of hot sand-paper and he craved more alcohol with a desperate craving that would not be denied. At the edge of the open square which held the railroad station he plunged into a saloon and pushed through its groups of loungers to the bar.

"A flask of whisky — the best you have," he said.

The bar-tender wiped his hands on his duck jacket and took down a squat bottle. "O. and S.," he said, affably. "Just blown in to town?"

Harry stared him in the eye. "Wrap that thing up, and be quick about it!" was his answer.

The man in the duck jacket muttered something under his breath, banged the package on the bar and rang up the payment on the cash-register with an angry jingle.

Harry thrust his purchase under his arm, went out, crossed the square and climbed aboard a train that was drawing out. He went rapidly forward to the smoker; there he — and the bottle he carried — would be unnoticed. As he sat down in the rear seat, the conductor passed by. Harry had no ticket. He handed him a bill.

"Where to?" asked the other briefly.

"How far do you go?"

"Birmingham."

"To Birmingham, then," said Harry.

The afternoon wore on, station after station went by. The man in the rear seat sat with his eyes straight before him, moveless except as from time to time he lifted a bottle to his lips and drank thirstily, avidly. The frenzied pain was gone now, leaving only a dull ache, and gradually, very gradually, this too slipped away into the void. He was now once more the man who had fled in his motor from the face of a convict in a court-room, flying through the night in a jumbled dream, strung upon a headlong speed through vacuity.

Evening came, with the glamour of peach-blown valleys and honey-lipped hills, lying under pale stars against the sunset. Night fell, with its cooler breeze through the windows, its glimpses of quiet, watching woods, of white mists wreathing across the meadows, of yellow lights. But Harry took no heed. Only hours later, when the train rolled into a great rotunda did he turn his head. He did not know where he was. He did not even wonder. He rose, kicked the emptied bottle under the seat, and left the train.

He went out of the station. It sat on a ridge above a great river and on the lower level he had a glimpse of a sordid purlieu of rambling streets, red-paned windows and gleaming doorways, the soiled earmarks of the city's slums.

He crossed the street and plunged aimlessly down a narrow alley toward the water-front.

CHAPTER XVII

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

THE potations in the smoking-car had had their first effect. Sevier had passed from the jumbled dream now — was safely ensiled in that strange fourth-dimensional empire into which he had first wandered during that wild night-ride in his motor, that region of tense consciousness that was yet without rule, in which every sense was acute, his brain clear as ice, but where impressions recorded themselves without co-ordination. Eye and ear drank in avidly each sight and sound, and he sniffed the thick smells as a hound sniffs a haunting but forgotten trail.

As he went further the dwindling signs of respectability vanished. He was now below the city's "dead-line" where, in segregated wantonness, vice and license unrolled their audacities fearless of the complaisant police regulations.

A hundred yards from the greasy docks lining the sluggish current from which a plumy mist was lifting, a wide screened doorway showed a blaze of electric-light upon a patch of saw-dust floor. Through it poured the tinny blare of a gramophone hooting a comic song, mingled with rumbling laughter and raised voices. It was a low-roofed, shambling build-

ing, planned for the delectation of the barge-man and the roustabout and now throbbing with their daily — and nightly — pleasures. Harry halted before it.

"Tough joint, eh?" The voice fell suddenly at his elbow.

He turned. The speaker was red-cheeked and brisk, with dapper sophistication and inquisitiveness written all over him. His shining straw hat had a coloured band, there were white pearl buttons on his patent-leather shoes and a natty stick swung lightly from his gloved fingers. "I can see you don't belong with that crowd," he said, nodding sagely toward the entrance.

"No," said Sevier. He was staring at the speaker with a penetrating intensity, thinking that, but for colouring and costume, they two somewhat resembled each other — speculating as to the slanting scar on the other's right cheek, that might have been the memento of a rusty nail or of a pet panther — thinking of these things and of a thousand things beside that were only remotely connected with either of them.

"Neither do I, but I take a high dive into it now and then. Let's go in and have a drink."

In Harry's middle distance another more decorous swing-door vibrated to and fro, with a sharp smell of hops, a rattle of glasses, a voice reckless but good-humoured — proposing a like libation. Beyond this in endless succession were openings and re-openings of a locked cabinet that had hung some-

where on a wall, and further yet, myriads of goblets, cut with shining prisms, reflecting rainbow colours on spotless napery. A drink?

"Why not?" he said, and striking open the door, led the way into the noisy interior, reeking with stale odours, with strong tobacco-smoke, with carouse and profanity. He strode across the floor, shouldering his way unceremoniously through the press, and sat down at a small deal table that was unoccupied. His companion seated himself opposite. He was looking at Harry with critical admiration, noting his lithe athletic build and the certain, confident swing of his movements. His eye lighted.

"Gad!" he said, with a little laugh. "To tell the truth I wouldn't have cared to come in here alone, though I've been in a good many shady boozeries. Allow me to introduce myself. My name's John Stark — that's the name I play under, that is. I'm an actor. I'm trying out a new play, the 'Jail-bird.' Perhaps you've seen the bill-boards."

"Of course," said Harry. The title sprang instantly into his mind, blazoned on a gaudy bill-board against a maple-shaded street:

"Do not fail to see this Talented Star
In his Gripping Drama, *The Jail-Bird.*"

It multiplied, stamping itself on a thousand walls, a chromatic procession tumbling into the distance.

The other nodded in a self-satisfied way. "It's a

great play. Got the real human dope in it. It'll go big, too. That's why I come to these places — to study 'business.' See that teamster with the pock-marked face and the tattoo on his arm? What a make-up that would be! ”

The burly, half-drunken driver, in red-flannel shirt with a snake-whip in his armpit, his back to the bar, poured from a gurgling black bottle. “Hear what it says?” he hiccupped — “‘It's good — s'good — s'good — s'good — s'good!’ ”

John Stark withdrew his eyes from the fascinating study, as a waiter, in an apron that had in some remote epoch aspired to white, with a strip of soiled towelling thrown over one arm, set two thick glasses on the table, with a surly “well?”

“I'll take a silver fizz,” said the actor.

“The same,” said Sevier — “and be quick about it!”

The harsh admonition thrust across the noise. The phrase had no meaning to Sevier, it had been merely the echo of another bidding that he had given at some other time, in some other world, repeating itself now when the hidden spring of association was touched. But it brought a resentful glare from the waiter. The loungers standing nearest shuffled truculently, and the teamster by the bar turned an ugly look upon them. The man in the dingy apron thumped down a black demijohn on the table.

“Take it straight or not at all,” he said in a surly tone.

Harry's companion poured both glasses. He leaned across the table with sparkling eyes. "I'm in the title-rôle," he confided. "[The story is like this. I'm a business man, and the other chap — he has a grudge against me — has me in his power. He's the Great What Ho — a regular top-notch, plenty of money, a winner with the women, horses, steam-yacht, everything. The house he lives in was mine, but he's got it by trickery and seized it while I was abroad. I come back and find him in possession. But in the house — he doesn't know this, you see — hidden behind a panel in the library, are papers that will show him up and put him behind the bars. I've got to have those papers, and the only way is to get into the place and take them."

He paused and sipped from the glass before him, then resumed:

"Curious thing, luck. I've had no end of trouble getting up the scenery, but to-day I saw exactly the lay-out I want to picture — a whacking big house in this very town. Right in the heart of the city too, not a mile from here, but shut in from the road. Belongs to about the richest man in the place. I koddaked it for my scene-painter. Look here."

He took a pencil from his pocket and sketched rapidly on the deal table-top as he went on.

"It's set in trees and there's a wide, oval porch along the front — like this — fine old southern effect, eh? — with Cape Jessamine bushes under the windows. A long wing runs down one side — here.

In there is the library. I come on in a kind of prologue, no lines — shadows and moonlight, town-hall clock striking off one side — you know. I'm desperate. I try the doors. They're locked, of course. But there's a little window on the second floor that's open. I climb up a trellis and crawl in. There I am in the house."

He stopped and emptied his glass.

"There's a two-minute dark — no curtain, but a quick change, then lights up and the stage shows the Great What Ho's library, with me on the threshold, for the opening scene. I get the papers from the panel, and just then —"

"Yes, yes," said Harry. He had been staring steadily at the other — staring with his outer eyes, but with that curious inner vision, which was the gift of the intoxicant he had drunk, seeing himself, detached and moving through the significant scene that was being sketched before him, his alert but liquor-bound mind filling in strange, lurid detail which rushed forward to crowd the obscure spaces. He reached forward and gripped the actor by the arm with a force that made him wince — "and then —"

A stillness had struck the noisier babble and Harry's mental connection on a sudden broke. A young woman in the red Jersey and poke-bonnet of the Salvation Army had passed about the room and was now standing by the table. She stretched her tambourine. "If you please, gentlemen," she said.

Harry laid a silver half-dollar in her tambourine and his companion did the same, when the waiter who had served them spoke to her: "Clear out, you. You've got your money, now go."

"And be quick about it!" said Harry, distinctly.

The remark had not the excuse of proprietorship and it roused fury in the sluggish minds about them to whom the addition was extraneous and gratuitous, a smug insult of one who from his manner belonged to a class that despised them, offered to one whose daily habit proved that she did not. With an oath the drunken teamster of the pock-marked visage lurched forward, rolling a red-flannel sleeve along a hairy biceps.

The dingy Ganymede thrust him back. "Leave him to me!" he ground savagely, and turning, struck at Harry with envenomed force.

The fist, however, did not reach home. Harry's brain and eye were working with the deadly precision of the practised athlete. The suggestion of combat was complete, and with sober caution and reason dead, the bodily mechanism rushed to meet it. There was a lightning-like parry — a crisp, smashing return blow. Then suddenly the room turned a shambles, a red surging mass of hands that tore, of thrown missiles, of shattering glass, through which sounded a shrill whistle and the tattoo of a thorn-baton on the pavement outside.

Two minutes later Harry stood unhurt in the open air, and a blue-jacket held the door against a cursing

pandemonium. "*Run, you fool!*" he panted. "I can't hold it but a minute. *Run!*"

And Harry ran. Not from fear or dread, but in instant response to that mental spur, without reason, or logic, or conscious thought. The new mental formula for the present moment superseded the old. The dingy saloon, the effervescent young Thespian, the fight — all fell away, were gone, and there was only the rigid empty calm through which he sped, and far above him the sound of a wind like a silken sea. It was close on midnight, the more decorous streets into which he presently emerged deserted, for intermittent clouds were now blotting the moonlight and a sprinkle of rain was falling. The sparse pedestrians stared or shrank away, but none followed, no patrolling guardian of the law forbade. He ran without direction or purpose, until suddenly — he halted.

He had come to the side of a great enclosure, the grounds of a mansion, surrounded by a high stone wall with tiled top, in which was set a gate with tall posts holding dim-lit yellow globes. It was not at these, however, that Harry was looking; his gaze went beyond, where, touched by the rainy moonlight, stretched the long façade of a Colonial house with a wide oval porch. At one side was a wing, with a lattice climbing over its doorway, and the damp air was full of the scent of jessamine.

He stiffened. The contours fell with fateful correspondence over another picture which had been

etched on his brain that night with the sharp outlines of a photographic plate. The old spring had been touched, and the eerie mechanism was responding. It was his own house, but now it sheltered the Great What Ho, and in that wing was hidden the thing he must secure for his own salvation!

Harry entered the gate and crept across the lawn, warily, from bush to bush. In the curious dual-consciousness that seemed to divide his self into two independent yet identic entities, he had no sensation of strangeness that he should already have made that slinking journey once before, that each detail should possess the quality of predestination. In the shadow of the ivied walls he softly tried the front door. It was locked, but he had known it would be. He looked up; he had known what he should see — the small window in the wing, open, as he could see from the swaying of the light curtain in the air.

He crept to the lattice and deftly and softly drew himself up. No twig snapped, scarce a leaf rustled beneath his careful movements. In a moment he touched the sill of the open window and slid inside.

He was in an upper hall and soft, luxurious carpet was under his feet. By the dim light from the window he crept noiselessly down the stair. There before him stood the door behind which lay the thing he must have. He put his hand on the knob, turned it softly and opened the door.

The mental picture which he had been tracing sud-

denly frayed and vanished like a dissolving view. The room was brightly lighted. At one side sat a great safe, beside whose steel door stood two men, one tall and thin, whose eyes glittered through the holes of a black cambric mask, the other short and stocky with red-rimmed eyes and a shock of sand-coloured hair.

They stood like setters at point, crouching tensely forward, and the latter held a pistol levelled at him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRICE

WITH the sudden disintegration of the mental picture he had been tracing, and the instant stoppage of the tense action of mind and body, Harry Sevier came to himself. He awoke as he had done on the night of the trial, with the abrupt halt of his motor at the railroad-crossing — awoke instantly to knowledge of himself, but dazed and shaken, grasping at phantasmagoric fragments that were swiftly dissolving in his brain, in a bewilderment in which he could only stare voicelessly at the black mask that confronted him, at the round muzzle that spelled danger.

The man of the sand-coloured hair spoke: "It ain't him," he said in a low voice. "Not one of the servants, either." He stepped forward. "How did you get in?"

"I don't — know," said Harry. "Yes, I — I fancy it was through a window."

"What did you come for?"

"I wanted to — get something."

There was an instant's pause. Then his questioner came forward with a cat-like tread. His free hand busied itself in deft exploration. "No gun on him," he said.

Something like a chuckle came from behind the mask. "I reckon he's telling the truth, but he's a new one and we scared about all out of his head there ever was in it!"

The other turned one side to where a heavy portière screened an alcove, parted the curtains and set a chair in the hidden space. He pointed to it. "Sit there," he gruffly commanded, and to the man in the mask he added, "Get on with your part of the job. We won't take no risks — I'll take care of *him!*"

Harry sat down. The dream-like fragments at which he had been grasping were gone now into thin air, and out of the misty limbo the past was growing back: the note he had received, the smashed wall-cabinet, the fiery drink that scorched his throat, his mad masquerade, the boarding of the train at the station, the friendly, stupifying flash, then flight, on and on — and then, this lighted room, the safe, the levelled weapons! Into what sordid drama of the under-world had he wandered?

He flinched at the pressure of a cold steel ring against his temple — the man with the sand-coloured hair was "taking care" of him. The latter leaned forward and peered searchingly into his face. "Haven't I seen you before, somewheres?" he asked.

"Who knows?" said Harry. He had answered that look by one that, even as he spoke, had opened to strange intelligence. The stocky frame, the

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small red-rimmed eyes, the up-thrust, wiry hair belonged to his client of that far away trial, the man whom he had sent to a convict's cell and who now, by route of ball and stripe, had fled to the dismal demesne of habitual criminality! "Who knows!" Paddy the Brick had not now the piteous, shrinking look that had been turned to his counsel in the courtroom! The manhood was gone from the mottled features, which now wore the furtive look of the hunted, the sign-manual of cunning, incorrigibility and debauch.

Paddy the Brick withdrew his eyes. The involuntary question had passed. There was, after all, little in the smooth-shaven countenance of the man he guarded to suggest a bearded face that his memory searched for.

"Quiet!" warned the man in the mask, and kneeling by the safe door, resumed the delicate manipulation which had been so startlingly interrupted. He turned the combination swiftly and deftly, his side-face pressed against the unyielding steel, his ear listening intently to the fall of the tumblers that chattered like elfin castenets.

Harry sat silent and moveless, sharply conscious of the cold ring against his temple. Whither had his besotted flight carried him? To some distant city, into another state perhaps, where he now figured in a coarse and desperate adventure that might end anywhere, in some shameful *exposé* which he could not foresee. In whose house was he? Whose

money was it these nightly prowlers intended? And what ironic demon had beckoned him here to play this passive part in the despoiling?

There was suddenly a sharp click, a turn of the nickelled handle, and on mute hinges the safe-door opened. "So!" said the man in the mask, complacently. He began to pull open drawers and ransack pigeon-holes, his fingers passing deftly through the papers they contained.

On the instant there was a muffled sound in the hall outside — a door swinging to, and voices.

"S-s-s!" The low hiss was an incarnate menace. The man by the safe swung the steel door to, but without closing its lock, and snapped off the lights. The room fell into thick darkness. Harry felt, rather than heard, that the other had swiftly entered the alcove, and drawn the portière into place. His companion had made no sound, but the aching circlet bit hard again into Harry's temple, with a warning as sharp as it was silent.

The door opened, there was a groping footstep, then the lights went up, and a woman's voice, clear and imperious, mingled with the lower answers of the obsequious servant who had shown her in — a familiar voice at which Harry's blood seemed to grow still in his veins:

"No matter how late he is, I will wait. You say he is at his office — is it so near as that? Yes, I think you may send for him — no, wait — that telephone on the desk! Could I speak with him?

No — I think after all I would rather wait. What number did you say? 'Seven-thirty-two Sumner?' Thank you. Then if he does not come soon, I will call him up. Thank you — no, I want nothing."

Harry repressed an impulse to cry aloud. A thin streak of light showed between the edges of the silken hanging, through which the man in the mask was peering, and for a slender instant, under the crook's elbow, he could see into the room. The slender figure standing there under the chandelier was Echo Allen!

She was in a dark travelling dress and wore a light veil through which her profile looked strained and white. The unexpected sight of her intensified the haggard pain of heart which had come back to Harry with his awakening, and this was staggered by the knowledge that they two were together in this unknown dwelling.

The door closed upon the servant. Behind the portière the red-rimmed eyes peered questioningly into the eyelet holes of the black mask. They said as plainly as speech, "There is only the woman. Why not make for the open — now?" But the other was an older hand. The room had but the single door and the servant might be standing on the other side. Grim danger lurked in hue and cry, and there was always the chance that the woman might weary of waiting and go. He had a liking for the long chance. He shook his head.

Harry's straining ears caught now the dragging

rustle of a skirt. Echo was moving slowly across the floor, and in a moment he saw her again through the slender opening. She was standing tense and straight, her hands wrung together, finger twisting against finger, before the desk telephone. He saw her hand go out to the instrument, then draw back as though it had been a poisonous snake. Then suddenly he saw her seize the transmitter and put it to her ear. The bell whirred.

"Madison, seven-thirty-two."

There was a pause, in which she repeated the number, and in it Harry felt that her face had hardened and set, like some cooling plastic beneath an invisible mould.

"Is that — is it . . . Mr. Cameron Craig?"

In spite of his iron control, Harry could not repress a start. He knew now where he was! The house behind whose curtain he perforce skulked with a brace of thieves, was Cameron Craig's! And she, on this very day, had journeyed here too. A sense of an overfate, sardonic and unescapable, rushed upon him. What a topsy-turveydom of chance, what a dove-tailing of accident, had wrought for this strange *contretemps*! In the instant she waited a harrowing question stabbed him. What was she doing here, to-night, at midnight — in this environment which had bred unseemly stories — to enter which, under such circumstances, a woman must be unmindful of what should be most dear?

" . . . Do you know my voice? Yes, you are

right. . . . Unbelievable, yes. Many things are unbelievable that — happen. Listen. I am at your house, in your library. . . . No! Wait. I have something to say to you, *now*. You shall answer it first. Once you asked me to marry you. I will do so, on one condition. . . . The — the letters written by my father. You will not use them, publish them. You will give them into my hands. . . . Yes. . . . One has been photographed — yes, the plate. You swear to do so, when I am your wife? . . . Yes, to-night — if you — wish. . . . What? In — in five minutes? . . .”

The receiver clattered down upon the desk, as she sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. To her the broken sentences had knelled hope gone, the passing of youth and love, the coming of a night in which was no star; but to the man sitting in such assiduous stillness behind the curtains, they had told a story that sent the warm blood coursing through his veins. Instead of being false to him, Echo was really sacrificing herself on the altar of name and family. She did not love the man with whom she had just spoken! It was constraint that had sent her there at that dubious hour, to make a bitter bargain. Letters written by her father? What they were — in what way compromising — Harry could not guess. Some indiscreet correspondence perhaps, which, twisted out of context, might be made ground of malicious political criticism. He knew her love for her father. In some

way she had learned of these letters, had scented danger to him, and now would ward the harm from him at any cost to herself! "Think as gently of me as you can"—the words of her note passed through Harry's mind. When she wrote that she had known that she should give herself to Craig! He felt a whirl of rage. The cowardly, contemptible cad, who would have his desire at the cost of all that was decent and clean-handed! It should never be, never, never! Why else had fate dropped him there, like a stone from a sling? And yet for the moment he was as helpless as a rat in a trap. There, only a half-dozen steps away lay those letters, the safe door unlocked. Yet the steely pressure on his temple told him that a single word, a move, and he would be ingloriously past rendering aid to anybody, with a bullet in his skull.

Harry was conscious that the two men beside him exchanged glances—they were going to make a dash for it. His every nerve tightened. But at that instant the door opened upon the obsequious servant. "Did you ring, Madame?" he asked.

"I rang the telephone," she replied dully. "I called up Mr. Craig. He is coming."

"Very good, madame." This time he did not leave, but moved about the room, setting straight a book upon the table, adjusting a vase, glancing furtively at her the while. The moment for flight had passed.

Endless minutes ensued. Then in the strained

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silence there fell a sharp step outside, and the servant went quickly from the room. Harry felt a little tremor run over him. There was the sound of a key grating in a lock. The outer door opened and clanged shut.

Behind the portière Harry sat motionless, the muzzle of the weapon at his temple, his hair stirring to the suppressed breathing above his head, and the man in the mask shifted his felt-shod feet, restlessly but without sound.

CHAPTER XIX

PADDY THE BRICK INTERVENES

I COULD not believe your voice." The heavy tones jarred across the quiet. "I could not believe that it was actually true!"

"Do you accept my offer?" Echo's voice was without a tremor; it held the same hard quality that controlled her features.

"Accept!" He came toward her — would have taken her hands, but that she drew back. "Do you remember what I told you that day in your garden, a year ago — that nothing counted, nothing but *you*? For you I would barter every ambition I have ever known. I would sell the world, if I had it!"

"When you told me that," she said steadily, "I answered that I did not love you. I have not changed in that regard, nor shall I ever change. I can bring you no love, but I can — can marry you."

He laughed harshly. "Very well; I would not have it different, after all. I am not made on the pattern of other men: I would rather take you against your will — you will be all the more mine! I love even that fine disdain of yours! For it shall not last — I swear that! You ~~shall~~ love me in the end, as I have loved you!"

"Loved!" she repeated, with an accent of chill and wondering scorn.

"Yes, loved!" The words were almost a cry: they held fierce protest, even anger, yet there was in them a kind of appeal that lent them a sombre and tragic dignity. "But you despised me! You had stood first of all things. But if you could be nothing to me, then the game I played stood second. I played, as always, to win. The cards fell oddly — your father's letters, no matter how, came into my hands. They were to my purpose, and I would have used them. Why should I hold back? Out of regard for him? I regard no man!"

"Yet he is my father. And you profess — ah, if this is love, I had rather you hated me! I know nothing of a love that is neither brave nor compassionate, that strikes at the aged and defenceless and that is without — honour!"

He had not taken his eyes from her face, and now there grew in them a strange, haggard fire. Relentless and unscrupulous as was that love of his, Harry could have pitied him at that moment. "Honour?" he said. "It is an empty word to me! What is honour, what is anything, to me without you — Echo, Echo!"

"If you love me so — and now, indeed, I will believe it — give me the letters!" She took a step toward him, her hands clasped together. "Be as chivalrous as you are strong! Do not do this ig-

noble thing to break my life! I may be your friend, if not — that other. Surely you cannot want to take me at such a price! Do this and all my life long I will be grateful! Oh, I would ask you on my knees! Give me the letters!”

He looked at her where she stood breathlessly, with arms extended, her face bent and pleading, and the sight opened wide within him an abyss that thronged thick with evil passions. The gentler purpose that for a heart-beat had fluttered white wings above the chasm dropped plummet-like into the depths. Give her up? Now, when she came to him with her offer? Resign her — to that tippling *dilettante*, that flamboyant fop and fool who had drowned his success in a bottle? Not he! A savage elation sprang up in him.

“When you are my wife!” he said.

She straightened, withdrawing her arms with a little gesture of despair and relinquishment.

“Where are the letters?”

He pointed to the safe. “They are there.”

“When will you give them to me?”

“To-night — the same hour you marry me. You shall burn them if you like, here — in this very room — with your own hands.”

“You swear?”

“I do. And whatever else men may say of me, there is no man living who can say I have ever lied.”

There was an instant's silence and when Craig

spoke again all feeling had vanished from his voice. He was once more the deliberate and incisive man of action. He snapped the lid of his watch.

"It is very late," he said, "but it can be managed. It shall be at the hotel — you can rest there while I make the necessary arrangements. My chauffeur is off-duty to-night, but it is only a block away, fortunately. Shall you mind walking?"

"No," she said, apathetically.

Harry was holding himself hard. They were going. He saw clearly his course of action. His two partners in that sorry escapade might have what they had come for — he could compound with them, could take the letters to the hotel and put them into Echo's hands. She would never need to know how he had gained them — that drunken episode, whose very memory must bring a shaming flush to his cheek, should be buried forever! The letters would not have come to her from Craig, and she would stand absolved of her promise. But even as this ran through his mind, fate thrust its hidden hand from the cloud.

"One moment," said Craig. "When I came in, it was beginning to rain. You will need a cloak of some sort." He turned abruptly to the curtained alcove.

The pressure on Harry's temple relaxed. The black mask thrust forward, the man with the sand-coloured hair parted the hangings — his outstretched arm shot out toward the advancing figure. Harry's

gaze saw something red leap up from Craig's temple, even before the terrifying concussion rocked the room — a sound threaded by Echo's scream.

There was a rush, a curse and a scramble, flying feet and a dismayed shout from the hall — then a shocked quiet in which he stood disconcerted and appalled, staring between the shielding curtains, through pungent smoke-wreaths, at a girl, her hand over her eyes, who shrank in overmastering terror from a massive form that lay collapsed on the rug before her — Cameron Craig, inert and still, blind and deaf now to sight and sound, the brain empty of scheming, the full cup of his ambition dashed from his lips by the crashing bullet of a slinking house-breaker.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT MATTERED MOST

WITH that scream Harry's every nerve had become as tense as wire. In his mind's eye he saw her innocence tangled in this hideous web of burglary — perhaps of murder, her name on every lip, her face blazoned in every yellow extra, as the "woman in the case!" The crisis spelled *now* and he acted with swift instinct.

He snatched the black mask from the floor and adjusted it to his own face, then darted to the safe and jerked open its heavy door. While the retreating servant's alarm still echoed from the hallway of the empty wing, his fingers, with the swiftness of desperation, went searching the papers in the safe. He came almost instantly upon what he sought — a thin packet of letters, tied together with a small photographic plate, ticketed with the name "Beverly Allen."

Echo had shrunk back, was leaning now against the wall, thriving terror of him in her eyes. He came toward her.

"Here!" he said, his voice muffled by the mask. "The letters! Take them and go — go instantly!"

"He has — killed him!" she gasped. "Why do you —"

Harry was sick with apprehension. As in the instant of drowning the smothering intelligence sees pass in vivid review before it the innumerable mosaic of a busy life-time, so he saw, swiftly arrayed in the imminent climax, the perilous hazards by which she was surrounded. Suppose Craig was dead, and she were apprehended, the letters put in evidence, and she told the truth, word for word, as she knew it. If her own estimate of their significance was a correct one, might not the most sinister suspicion then rest upon her? And if, as seemed likely, she was wrong in that surmise — even were the presence of accidental burglars proven — what could explain her presence there, alone in Craig's midnight library? Would it not seem to the great sceptical, sophisticated world only a tale invented to cover the old hackneyed story of a woman's infatuation? Would it not ruin her? He thrust the packet into her shaking hands, seized her arm and dragged her to the hall.

"Quick!" he said, roughly. "The house is roused! Hurry — for heaven's sake!" He thrust her through the outer door. "Down the path to the gate! Go!"

She looked at him a breathless instant. On the floor above them a window was flung open and a shout rang out. Then, drawing a breath that was a sob, she caught the letters to her breast, turned, and fled in an anguish of speed through the misty shrubbery.

In the bluntness of the dilemma Harry's only thought had been to get her away and speedily — then to make his own escape. For he himself stood also in evil case. If Echo's presence there would be difficult to explain, what could be said of his own? To whom, save perhaps the occasional student of aberrant mental phenomena, would the true story of his blind and besotted adventuring seem credible? It came to him instantly now, however, that to insure her safe retreat, he must jeopardise, perhaps fatally, his own. The two house-breakers had no doubt planned their flitting — possibly a handy ladder in some hidden angle of the wall; but the open gate was the only route he knew, and he had sent Echo by this way. For him to follow in her footsteps would draw the damnable hue and cry and double the odds against her. She needed, perhaps, only minutes, but the stir of frightened awakening that sounded through the upper floor told him that for him even seconds might be fatal. Great beads of sweat broke on his forehead.

And what an alternative! He, Harry Sevier, of position and clean honour, to be arrested red-handed, in apparent comradeship with criminals, a partner in a desperate attempt at robbery under arms! To be haled to court, to sit as he had seen men sit so often, under a perilous judgment! For with the logic of the legal mind perilous indeed Harry knew it would be. If Craig lay dead in the room behind

him, he would be charged with his murder! A chill ran over him.

As these thoughts rushed through his mind, Harry passed through a crucial episode of his mental life — its first vital and supreme moment. It was not of himself he thought now. It was only of Echo. What became of him mattered little. It was she who mattered most! At whatever risk to himself he must turn the pursuit from her!

A burly man-servant, bareheaded and coatless, came panting from the rear between the trees. Lest he take the path toward the gate, Harry blundered, in his view, across the lighted porch and dashed around the wing, the other giving instant cry. Harry led him on, doubling about the shrubbery. Near at hand the wall reared, hopelessly high and without a break. He skirted a huddle of servants' quarters, rounded the main building and came again to the front. And then, approaching at a double-quick across the lawn, he caught the flash of a bull's-eye. With a wave of thankfulness he realised that the helmeted figure who carried it was coming from the gate. Echo had passed through safely!

Unseen he slipped again into the shadow of the great open door from which he had come. Until that moment he had not realised that he still held in his hand the black mask. There was nothing to do now — his own escape was impossible, but he had saved her!

Suddenly the hall light went up, and with it a brusque voice spoke from the stairway.

"Hands up! I'm covering you. He's here, lads — we've got him cornered. Tell that silly maid to quit screaming and ring up the police."

Harry had lifted his hands above his head. The black mask fell at his feet. "All right," he said.

CHAPTER XXI

CRAIG'S WAY

A HALF-HOUR later a surgeon and a nurse had been hurriedly summoned from the hospital, the wounded man had been carried to an upper chamber, and Harry Sevier set in a room across the hall from the library, under guard, hand-cuffs on his wrists. A blue-coated policeman stood grimly at his side, another at the door, and from time to time the white, awed countenance of some servant appeared to stare at him from the threshold and disappear.

His own face, though haggard, was apparently unmoved by the strenuous excitement that hung about the place, yet behind the affected nonchalance his brain was in a turmoil of hope and of dread. In the swift and breathless decision that the event had forced upon him he had not had time to weigh all chances. It had seemed then that the vise must grip either him or Echo, and that the choice lay in his hands. In the moments that followed, however, as he sat moveless in the strident confusion, he had realised that the problem had been by no means so simple, and it had come to him with a pang that Echo's certain safety had lain only in his own escape.

She now believed that she had been extricated

from danger by a common thief who, in his rifling of the safe, had seen the letters she pleaded with Craig for, and in the final tragic moment had taken pity on her plight. When she learned that one of those house-breakers had been Harry Sevier, what then? She would never believe him the vulgar criminal! Her imagination would rush to another explanation which would give his presence there a dismal significance. She would conclude that he had somehow discovered the strait in which she conceived her father stood, and in an attempt to retrieve the letters had met Craig's chicanery with technical crime — made use, which to him had seemed justifiable, of cracksmen, and with them had been caught in the emergency whose sudden panic had evoked that shot from the alcove! Whichever way the tragedy turned, it would be infinitely darkened for her by the reflection that it had been her strait which had brought the trouble upon him.

And if murder had been done, and she learned with shrinking heart that he, Harry, stood accused by the law, what then? She knew that his hand had not pulled the trigger, for she had seen the face of the shooter. Her gasping exclamation — "He has — killed him!" — had made that clear to Harry. She would rush to the rescue, forgetful of all else, and with her testimony, bring down the avalanche upon her!

On the heels of these reflections a thrill of hope had come to him. Craig was not yet dead — there

had been no sign from above-stairs since the hurried arrival of the surgeon. Also it was anticipated that he would recover consciousness. Harry's knowledge of criminal procedure told him that this was the meaning of his long detention there. Should consciousness come, if merely for an appreciable interval, he would be brought face to face with the wounded man. It was this that all awaited now, and in it Harry discerned the sole possibility of saving the situation.

"Craig must have seen him when he fired!" he told himself. "For the fraction of a second they were face to face. If he is able to make a statement, it will clear me! He will be silent about Echo, too, for he will expect, if he lives, to make her his wife — it will be a long time, probably, before he misses the letters! And if I am disassociated, by Craig himself, from the attack on his life, there will no longer be any question of her involving herself to defend me!" His heart lightened and the great load seemed to lift from his soul. It was the implication of Echo that had made the situation impossible — the unbelievable coincidence of their joint presence — in damnable propinquity with the shooting. With Echo eliminated and he himself free from that cowardly indictment, would not all yet be well? He was well enough known. He was no sordid house-breaker — in spite of the humiliating incident of his entrance there that night!

His thought broke, as a spruce young man, with

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the air of authority which is the perquisite and prerequisite of the private-secretary, entered and whispered with the guardian at the door.

Harry's heart seemed to stop beating. "Is he — dead?" he asked.

The young man looked at him coldly. "Not yet."

"Will he live?"

There was a longer pause before the other replied: "It's too soon to tell yet. It's up to you to hope so, I imagine."

He whispered again with the officer, then crossed the hall to the library, which he entered, closing the door behind him.

When the secretary reappeared he went quickly up the stair and along a hall. There he tapped on a door and opened it.

The room disclosed was the one in which Craig lay. At one side was a small table covered with a white cloth, with a *mêlée* of nickelled instruments, rolls of absorbent bandaging and a basin of red-dened liquid. The air was full of the sickish-sweet *halitus* of some drug. Craig's head on the pillow was wound with the white swathing and the nurse stood beside the bed. The doctor came forward, and the secretary spoke to him in an undertone.

All at once Craig opened his eyes. He looked acutely at the faces so near him, the cloth-covered table with its instruments, the white-capped nurse.

"I — know," he said. He tried to lift a hand to his bandaged head. "How — bad?"

The doctor laid a professional hand on the one that strayed across the coverlet. "We want to pull you through, Mr. Craig," he said with soothing assurance, "and you must help us by wiping every anxiety from your mind. Only a dozen words with your secretary here, to help you stop even thinking, and then you are going to sleep."

The young man came to the bed-side. "It was an attempted burglary, as you probably realised, sir. Two men were hidden in the library and you were shot when they tried to get away. One of them has been caught. The servants say a lady was with you at the time and the police want to know who she was."

Craig did not reply immediately. Echo had slipped away in the confusion! Well, so much the better. Her presence could not have helped. It was no more to his interest than to hers — since she was to be his wife — that the story of her midnight call should be bruited abroad. "I — don't know — her," he said.

"I'll tell them so," said the secretary. "The safe had been opened, but its contents are practically intact. I have checked up all the papers on the list and there seems to be only one thing missing. Perhaps you took that out yourself. It is the last item on the list — a package of letters."

A quick gleam crossed the white face on the pillow.

"Gone? No — no. Impossible. They were — of no — value to — any one but me."

"You may have put them in your desk," said the other. He turned to the surgeon. "The police want to bring up the man for identification."

The man of medicines frowned. "I suppose it has to be," he said. "Tell them to do so quickly. Only a word," he warned the wounded man.

A moment or two later the secretary tapped again at the door and it opened upon the two policemen. Harry walked between, the chain on his wrists clinking lightly as he stepped. One of them came forward to the foot of the great bed.

"You saw the man who shot you, Mr. Craig?"

"Yes."

He beckoned and Harry and his guardian moved forward into range of vision.

"You solemnly swear that what you shall say is the truth?"

"Yes."

"Is this the one?"

Craig stared — a look of negation that made Harry's heart leap. It was a look also that held no recognition, and in that instant, for the first time since that night's harrowing series of events had begun, Harry remembered that he stood in strange guise, in unaccustomed clothes and with smooth-shaven chin.

But into the eyes that gazed from the pillow recognition speedily came — recognition strangely com-

mingled of incredulity, amaze, distempered suspicion, leaping swiftly to a slow, deadly certainty. A lurid sequence was running across the fevered mind that the man confronting him could not read:

Harry Sevier sculking there and disguised — one of the burglars! The missing letters — Echo had gone with them! It had been a cunning, hypocritical plot, then, with a hired safe-robber and thug — and they had tricked and baffled him. Craig gasped. His eyes suffused with blood. He had said that he had not known the woman. Yet he could still score! Living or dying, he could drag down Harry Sevier to a black depth from which he should never rise again!

He laughed, a harsh jarring laugh. His face became convulsed. He tried to lift himself on an elbow. The nurse thrust her strong arms beneath the pillow and raised him. He pointed his finger at Harry.

"Yes!" he said in a crackling whisper. "He is the man who — did it! He — shot me!"

"Do you know him?" The officer spoke clearly, leaning forward.

"Yes. I — he is —"

But that was all. With a final vain effort, his head fell back on the pillow. That last flare of rage, of revengeful hatred, had exhausted the sick vitality, and he was gone into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXII

HARRY DECIDES

THE steel handcuff bit more hardly into Harry's wrist, but he did not feel it. His eyes were fixed and his face had grown grey. The accusation, with all its shuddering implications, had surged over him like the assurance of the unescapable end, the last engulfing wave of hopeless finality which, in its subsidence, left him cold and still. Malice and hatred had closed the door of hope.

His sacrifice had gone for nothing. He could not save Echo. The matter had been taken from his hands. She must be involved. If murder had been done, her passionate denial in his defence would no doubt suffice to save him — he knew his southern juries! — but at what a price to her would be his salvation! For though sufficient doubt would be insinuated to legally acquit him, in the eyes of their world harrowing suspicions must always cling to her. Collusion between her and himself, her lover, to secure compromising letters, a guilty understanding embracing possible murder! A midnight *rendezvous* with one lover, converted into swift tragedy by the vengeful pursuit of the other! So the speculations would run, and the baleful whis-

pers would follow her all her life. What matter though she married him? Would love make up for that?

It was the Harry Sevier of remorseless logic, of clear thinking and rigid analysis, who reasoned now.

A tall old clock stood at the turn of the echoing stair and as he descended between his two uniformed attendants, grimly watchful of his every movement, he noted mechanically that it was two o'clock. It came to him with a chill and awed amazement how much might happen within one round of the clock. When those hands had last pointed to two o'clock he had stood in his office, a man of reputation and newly-ordered life, with all his heart beating to love; now he was disgraced, the woman he loved about to know the shame and hideous notoriety of scandal, both of them to be pilloried together as principals in another of those horrifying revelations of double-life which at periodic intervals shock a community's decorum!

It was not for himself he was thinking first. His pain for Echo swallowed up his own. As he sat in the cab between his guardians, bound for the station-house and the police interrogatory that should fling abroad its sensation in the morning's papers, his composure crumbled. He bent and put his cold face in his colder hands. His lips moved voicelessly.

"Echo . . . Echo!" he whispered. "You have had my love, you have it now. You could have my

life, if I could give it — every day, every drop of my blood, would not be enough to pay the price of what you must bear! But it is out of my power. I thought I could save you, my darling! But I can't. . . . I can't. . . . If I might only suffer alone, and you never know! ”

He lifted his head with a start. A thought had darted to his mind like an impinging ray of light. Why *should* she ever know? Why should any one know — if Craig died? Only Craig who had known him in the past, had recognised him as Harry Sevier. Perhaps that was the greatest risk he should have to run. He could take refuge in silence, tell nothing, explain nothing. She would not know that the real shooter had not been taken. Could he maintain under the searching purview of the law that anonymity which he had sought to insure during the debauch into which he had so avidly plunged yesterday afternoon? Why not? He had so adjusted his home affairs, luckily, that a long time — perhaps many months — would elapse before his absence would be narrowly questioned. He was now in a city where he was not known: hundreds of miles of steel rails lay between him and the crowds to whom he was a familiar figure. His dark beard — so distinguishing a feature — was gone. He had discarded the characteristic gold-rimmed eye-glasses. Not an article of clothing he wore bore his name. His present face might be flung on printed pages to the four winds, and who, even of those who had

seen him day in and day out, would say, "It is Harry Sevier!"

There were but two contingencies. If Craig recovered sufficient consciousness to speak the name that had fainted on his lips when they two had been face to face in that room of hurried surgery — then his incognito would fall and fate must have its way. If Craig died without recovering consciousness — this, provided his own identity was not discovered, was the one way out for Echo.

For him it meant, probably, the last risk. He had now to meet no mere assumption of guilt, but an accusation, direct and unqualified, made under oath, in what might well be the hour of death. He could not offer in rebuttal evidence of character, reputation and standing. He was deliberately refusing to call his only witness to the fact. Yet he did not waver. The Harry Sevier who under the stress of impulse had acted so swiftly to save the woman he loved, elected the same choice now.

He would do it. Whatever the risk, whatever the ultimate cost to him, he would do it!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BROKEN PICTURE

“**H**YUH yo’ is, honey, smack-dab on time!” called ’Lige’s cheery voice, as he took Echo’s bag. “Yo’ fo’got ter say *which* train yo’ comin’ back on yistiddy, so ah ben waitin’ wid dee cya’age fo dee las’ fo’. Ah was figuratin’ on yo’ gittin’ hyuh fo’ dinnah, sho’.”

As they bowled along toward home Echo wondered if she could really be the same girl who had driven away the day before along those self-same streets! The strenuous events through which she had passed seemed the terrifying creation of a dream, a nightmarish panorama of the sick imagination, so wild and incredible all appeared in the serene light of this day: The painful scene in Craig’s library that had ended in swift tragedy, with the apparition between the portières of that baleful face — with its narrow eyes and upthrust of nondescript hair it had stamped itself ineffacably upon her memory! — the deafening shot and the after confusion — those breathless moments when she had run along the wet path, with a sense of flashing lights and alarm behind her — her safe emergence into the demure street, where she dared not run, compelling herself to walk albeit ready to faint with fear at

sight of a patrolling policeman — the ghastly delay in the stuffy waiting-room of the station where she had checked her bag on arrival — the suffocating relief when at last the express pulled out, bearing her away unchallenged.

Through the long night she had tossed feverishly in her berth, without undressing, at intervals feeling the meaning of the catastrophe in which she had figured surge over her in a flood. That catastrophe itself had saved her from one horror: but for it she would now be the wife of Cameron Craig — a thought that made her shiver. Now she was safe! In all that trip, fortunately, she had encountered no one she knew. She had seen but one servant at the house and in his presence had worn a light veil. Only Craig had known who she was! What if she had been taken — held as a witness? How could she have explained her presence except by the letters for whose suppression she had been ready to give her life's happiness? As in imagination she saw her father and herself pictured in the yellow press, the centre of gossip and humiliating notoriety, she hugged the letters to her breast with intensest gratitude toward the desperado who had extricated her from the instant crisis. With what swift self-possession he had acted for her safety! That in that lightning-like emergency he should have even thought of the letters filled her with astonishment. Over and over again she tried to picture his face *behind* the mask, as his hand had held out the packet to

her. Her senses had been shocked keenly alive at the moment: she had even noted — as in tense crises one notes inconsequent trifles — the ring on his finger with its curious, square green stone. A thousand times she lost herself in wonder that a man capable of such a deed to an unknown woman could yet be a common burglar, one of the desperate gang whose leader was now awaiting trial, and whose malignant face and levelled pistol haunted her. Then the shuddering thought would roll over her that she, Echo Allen, had witnessed the awful act of murder, and she would hide her face in her pillow, trembling and spent. Dawn had long been whitening the windows when the strained nerves relaxed and the body, fatigued by two sleepless nights, found fitful rest.

The sun had been high when she awoke and by the time she had made her toilette and drunk a cup of coffee she had reached the little station for which she had ostensibly started the preceding day. A rambling hack had taken her to the home of her aunt — a recluse who had for a dozen years regarded the outer world through the blurred medium of semi-invalidism, absorbed in her languid reading and her flowers. On arrival Echo had found the frail figure lying out among her roses, with white, wild butterflies flaunting about her, stronger than she had been for months past, and free from the querulous humours which generally held her. So keen was her delight in her betterment that Echo had found

it easy to accomplish her own departure after luncheon, though she generally stayed the night. There was for the present, therefore, no added absence to be accounted for, and the lapse of time might never have to be explained.

As she drove now from the station through the bustling, down-town streets toward Midfields, the knowledge that her father's secret was safe overshadowed all the pain through which she had passed. The dreadful memory dulled in the sunshine and the sense of security buoyed her. She would never have to tell her part in that terrible night to any one. Not even to Harry: she could tell him that she had never loved any one but him: that it had been misunderstanding that had driven her to send him that unhappy note. Her father himself need never be made aware that she knew his secret. It would be forever dead and buried!

She bade 'Lige stop at the post-office. At her aunt's she had wrapped the letters in thick wrapping-paper and sealed and tied the packet, and this she now addressed to her father, printing the words in a large, round hand. Then she bought some stamps, affixed them at one of the desks that lined the corridor and smudged them with ink to simulate a postmark. Once at home it would be easy to slip the parcel among his evening mail. He would believe that Craig had relented of his purpose, would destroy the letters, and the danger would be gone forever!

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Lastly, standing in the thronging thoroughfare, at the same dusty little desk, on a sheet of paper which she bought at the stamp-window, she wrote to Harry Sevier:

Forget the note I sent you yesterday. Count that it was never written, that everything — *everything!* — is as it was when we sat on the porch together the day before. I can't write the rest — but come to me to-night, and I will tell you.

ECHO.

She sealed and addressed this — as an after-thought, marking it *urgent* — and went out to the carriage. A few minutes later the horses drew up again, this time before the populous office-building that held Harry's offices.

She climbed the stair slowly, her heart hammering. She intended to hand the note to his clerk. If Harry had gone home, it would be sent to him there. On the landing she stopped, her breath coming quickly. The mahogany door was open and she could see a little way into the outer office. If she came face to face with him, what should she say?

But no sound of voices, no rustle of paper or scratch of pen, came to her. She went nearer — the place was empty. She took a hesitant step or two into the room. The door of the inner office was open — that was empty too, and its big desk closed. Harry was not there, but the clerk, at least, should not be far off, as the door had stood wide.

She went closer and peered into the inner office. Facing her from the wall was a small cabinet, its door, from which splinters of opaque glass were scattered about the rugs, smashed through as if by a heavy blow. Beneath it, on the desk-top, was a black bottle and a stained glass, tipped on its side.

All at once she started. She had caught sight of something that lay in the fire-place. She went and picked it up: it was a picture of herself — one she had never known Harry possessed — a photograph of her portrait that had been hung in a certain spring *salon* in Paris. It had been framed in silver, but frame and picture had been broken across, savagely torn and twisted into a remnant of metal and cardboard.

She dropped the defaced thing with a little cry and caught a hand to her breast. What must he have been thinking in that moment of ruthless destruction? It had been after he had read her note to him! Her cheeks flamed. Did he now despise her for what he had thought her flippancy, or hate her for having taken his love only to throw it away like an old glove? As she looked again at the riven cabinet and the bottle on the desk, a shiver of dread seized her. From the silent symbols there stood forth outlines that frightened her.

She went slowly out to the hall, the letter she had intended to leave crushed up in her hand. At the top of the stair stood a tall window and she halted in its embrasure and leaned against the sill, hearing

dully the muffled clack of the street and trying to see a mental way through the confusing conjectures that were leaping, like lurking beasts of prey, upon her. As she stood there voices sounded behind her, coming from the other end of the hall — the clerk was returning with a comrade:

“‘No,’ says he. ‘Don’t know *when* I’ll come back.’ Thought he looked a bit off coloured, too. Told me to close up the office till I heard from him, and not to forward anything. Rum go, eh?”

“Seems like mighty poor business,” ventured the other.

The clerk sniffed. “Business!” he exclaimed. “Much Sevier cares about that! A man with a brain like his and a silver tongue to boot doesn’t need business! But after that speech of his the other day I should think he’d sit tight as wax to those Civic Club people. They’re going to make a real campaign of it and he could get on the ticket sure. It’d be a *cinch*! Why he wants to light out abroad somewhere beats *me*! Well, *I* don’t care how long he stays. I’m going to shut up the shebang to-night and put in some good licks for my law-examination.”

They entered the office and the door closed upon their voices.

Echo stood motionless, looking down into the street. Harry had gone away! He had gone with despair and anger, or worse than anger, against her in his heart leaving behind him only that mangled

portrait and that ominous bottle on the desk! Where had he gone, and when should she see him again?

Just across the way a knot of people was gathering in front of a newspaper bulletin-board whereon a great white sheet was being pasted, and her gaze — first mechanically, then with a start of shrinking comprehension — read the staring headlines that had been roughly lettered upon it:

CAMERON CRAIG SHOT DOWN BY BURGLAR

DESPERATE MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER IN FINANCIER'S
LIBRARY

WOUNDED MAN UNCONSCIOUS BUT STILL ALIVE
MYSTERIOUS WOMAN INVOLVED

Cameron Craig was not dead! If he lived, he must one day learn that the letters were gone from the safe. Would he not then connect her with their disappearance? What would he do? She was aware, unhappily, to what lengths he was capable of going! Even though the letters were not his, would he accuse her of stealing them — *her*?

As she drove away the last two lines seemed to imprint themselves on her eyeballs in monstrous symbols of flame.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WOMAN WHO KNEW

JUNE came with its gold-born days, its passionate bird-songs and scents of roses, its shimmer of willow and pine and burnished lustre of down-bent holly-leaves and its evening mists wreathing the tall garden shrubs like wedding-veils. But the beauty and passion of the throbbing season came to Echo with a sense of mockery.

The night of her return she had carried out her plan as regarded the letters and her father had believed the package had arrived with his mail. When a little later he had told her that Cameron Craig had sent him the letter whose publication had been threatened, years had seemed fallen from his shoulders. She had been content that he should deem the act significant of the other's better nature emerging from the slough of an ignoble temptation — satisfied to know that in his mind the fact that it should have been one of the last acts Craig had performed before the tragedy, had invested it with a quality of the fateful and foreordained. Her own thought was absorbed with other things.

She had read avidly, though with unspeakable dread and loathing, the newspaper accounts of the

affair. The refusal of the arrested man to tell his name or where he came from, or to explain in the slightest detail — except brazenly to deny any part in it — the crime which had set the city in which it had occurred agog, had been duly chronicled; but the condition of the victim — since Cameron Craig was a power in the community — had absorbed a greater part of the popular interest, and the daily bulletins of his physicians had called forth far more comment than the unknown criminal whom he had identified as the man who had shot him. She had felt a great relief, also, in the knowledge that Craig had declared that he had not known his feminine visitor; and while the dread had inevitably lifted that when he discovered the loss of the letters he might betray her, it had faded at length in the certainty that, though he lived, the brain-injury had left him with clouded consciousness. Day after day he had lain voiceless, the outer injury gradually and surely yielding to the medicaments of healing, but the brain lapsed into a semblance of vacuity, inert and unresponsive, a mild phantom of the old Craig, the bodily functions become mere mechanism, the mind blank and fallow, its inner hurt waiting a diagnosis beyond the skill of local practitioners.

But though the secret Echo carried shut within her breast thus grew less painful with the passage of time, another dread was slowly drawing out of her heart its warmth and glow. This was the deeper hurt of Harry Sevier's absence.

Going about her daily affairs she thought of him without ceasing. She never drove through the streets that her gaze did not search the busy pavements — never passed the building that held his office that her eyes did not lift fearfully to its blank and blinded windows — never heard the postman's brisk step on the porch that her heart did not beat chokingly. Where had he gone? Chilly knew of no one who had received a letter from him. Aunt Judy, his cook, was as ignorant as she. She had even interviewed Suzuki, but it had been plain that the Japanese could tell nothing.

The recollection of the bottle and the overturned glass she had seen in his office recurred to her again and again, with all their bitter suggestions of surrender, relapse and demoralisation. Could it be that he had thrown away his hard-earned victory, hurled himself again into the pit from which he had so painfully climbed, which now might hold him forever? And coupled with this sickening thought came the reflection: what if Harry should die, far away somewhere, perhaps in some foreign country, without seeing her again, without ever knowing? There were hours, too, when, woman-like, she wondered whether he had cared so much: whether he had not found comfort in absence and given his love elsewhere.

Her cheeks grew paler day by day, and in spite of herself her step lagged and lassitude grew upon her. Often she felt her father's anxious look and knew

that her mother, in her stately and undemonstrative way was deeply disturbed. She took without protest the tonics Doctor Southall prescribed, but they brought little betterment, and, as physicians will, he at length began to talk of a sea-trip. In her growing apathy plans of this sort meant nothing to Echo, but she believed Harry had gone abroad, and the chance that they might meet, however slender it might be, called to her. When Mrs. Spottiswoode, therefore, announced her annual migration to Paris for her winter's wardrobe, it was arranged that Echo should make the voyage under her chaperonage.

Meanwhile the date had arrived for Echo's usual summer's visit to Nancy Langham in the neighbouring capital. Ordinarily a stay at the home of the girl of whom she was so fond, would have been something to look forward to with unmixed delight. Now, however, it had become a thing to shrink from. To walk those streets — perhaps to see again the house whose very memory had been such an anguish to her — she would gladly have evaded this. But when Nancy's letters promised to pass from pleading to epistolary tears, she at length yielded and late August found her the Langhams' guest for a final week-end.

As she dressed, on the afternoon of her arrival, there was a tap at the door and Nancy's voice said, "May I come in, dear? I want to see what you are going to wear."

"Yes, come in. I'm almost ready."

Echo had chosen a gown of black *tulle* with a gold rose at the brocaded girdle and Nancy looked at her admiringly. "Gracious!" she exclaimed. "That black—it positively sets your hair on *fire*! It makes you so pale, though. Do put a little dab of pink on your cheeks, Echo; you make me look positively lurid beside you!"

There was some truth in the comparison, for the younger girl was like a wild-rose, quivering with life and colour. She took the hare's-foot and came to Echo coaxingly. "Just a little tinge . . . like that. There! Now you are just perfect."

"Who's coming to tea, Nancy?"

"Oh, only a handful—Mrs. Moncure. You met her last year—and Mr. Meredith: he's the District Attorney—and the Shirley boys: they're very young and College-y—and five or six others. I only asked a few."

The Shirleys were first to appear and were followed by Mrs. Moncure, a mellow, winy woman with a white gown that smacked of the *Rue de la Paix*, and a complexion exquisitely made up. She greeted Nancy with a smiling graciousness, nodded to the gentlemen, and sat down on the sofa beside Echo.

"It was so sweet of Nancy to ask me to come," she said. "I've never had half a chance to chat with you before, though we met last year at a particularly stupid reception or something. This is so much

more home-y, isn't it?" She dropped into small-talk, rippling and charming, while Nancy poured the tea, and when Mr. Meredith presently arrived she presented him.

"Our District Attorney," she announced. "The Terror of the Lawless!"

"Now don't tell me I look a terror!" said he, beseechingly to Echo. "I'm a most mild-mannered man in private life, am I not, Mrs. Moncure?"

"I'm not sure yet whether I can give you a character," she answered. "I haven't seen this year's subscription-list to my pet charity."

"Blackmail!" the other asserted indignantly. "I'll subpoena you all as witnesses. And this is how I am treated for protecting you from criminality!"

"I like *that!*" exclaimed Nancy wickedly. "When burglars hide in our alcoves and jump out and shoot us when we're not looking! Poor Mr. Craig! I think you ought to be impeached, or impounded, or whatever they call it."

He laughed. "You know of the Craig affair, of course, Miss Allen," he said, turning.

Echo was glad for the touch of rouge on her cheeks. "Yes," she answered. "Oh, yes." Her gaze was on the basket of tulips on the tea-table, but she was really seeing Craig's smouldering black eyes — the lowering brows — the ruthless clamped lips — as she had seen his face in that moment of revelation in his study.

"The trial of the man who shot him opened to-

day," continued Meredith. He looked again at Nancy. "It's up to the police to prevent burglaries, you see. My part comes after the burglars are caught. I point the moral—as a deterrent to others still at large."

"I hope, then," said Mrs. Moncure, "that the moral will be well pointed in this case. I didn't sleep for a week after it happened."

"I shall certainly try to get him the limit," declared the attorney. "It'll be a long time before you need fear another midnight call from him, Miss Langham. While you are at the *matinée* to-morrow, please remember that I am vociferating frantically at the jury in your behalf. I surely deserve a cup of tea for that, don't I?"

"Well, on consideration, perhaps you do," asserted Nancy judicially, as she poured. "I'll relent."

She sat smiling, her dainty hand on the old silver urn, not observing how the smile had been stricken from Echo's face. Meredith noted the latter's strained look, however, and said, as he seated himself, "You mustn't think we are prone to such melodramatics. We don't have them often. This case is somewhat peculiar from the fact that the police can't identify the man we are trying. We don't know who he is or what is his record. For of course he has one."

"But," interposed Mrs. Moncure, "I thought criminals were always photographed—don't they

call it the ' Rogues' Gallery ' ? — and measured, so they *could* be identified."

" My dear lady," he replied, " for two years I've been trying to bring this city up to date in that very thing. The state has the Bertillon system, but it's in use only in the penitentiary, as a permanent record. The data, however, should be taken when a criminal is arrested, and there ought to be a system of exchange of these records with all penal institutions. There would be no temptation then to turn a bare-faced burglary, coupled with felonious assault, into a romantic mystery, as this man's counsel, my friend, Mason, judging from the line he took to-day, will try to do."

There was a pause, as he possessed himself of another scone.

" I wonder," said Mrs. Moncure, presently, " if we shall ever know who she was — the woman who was with Craig when he was shot."

Meredith laughed a little. " I imagine it's not likely," he returned. " He has declared once that he didn't know her, and we can all understand her own passionate reticence on the subject ! "

Mrs. Moncure smiled as she rose.

" Oh Sin ! Oh Sorrow ! and Oh Womankind ! (she quoted)

How can you do such things and keep your fame,
Unless this world, and t'other too, be blind ?

Nothing so dear as an unfilched good name ! "

For Echo the smiling words were barbed and winged with a painful significance. Again and

again, as she chatted mechanically over the tea-cups, they came back to her, coupled with the memory of the stories she had heard of Craig — the whispered allusions made with shrugs and lifted eye-brows.

As she lay in bed that night, she felt her hot cheeks flush through the darkness. Could the world think that of *her* — if it knew?

CHAPTER XXV

ON TRIAL

THE painful suggestions that had come to Echo over the teacups possessed her next day, when she drove with Nancy in the morning and in the afternoon, alone, selected her final steamer purchases — for she had made her farewells at home and was to go next day directly to New York, meeting Mrs. Spottiswoode on board the steamer. She was restless and uneasy and the thought of the trial proceeding at the court-house that day obsessed her. Here she was, she, Echo Allen, save for the escaped marauders themselves, the only one who had witnessed the deed whose imagined details the law was now laboriously reconstructing only a block away.

The thought brought a burning self-consciousness which began to be threaded by a fearful curiosity. She was feeling the repellent fascination that the scene of a hazardous episode ever after possesses for the secret actor in it.

Instinctively the lode-stone had drawn her steps to Court House Square. She looked across at the broad, open doorway. Why not go in? She had attended trials at home. She could find a place in the rear where she would be unobserved. For an

instant the thought crossed her mind that the prisoner might recognise her, but then she remembered that on that night at Craig's house she had worn a light veil.

She crossed the square quickly, and with sudden decision went up the steps and into the building. An usher sat on a stool by a door that stood ajar and before she knew it he had pushed it open and she found herself in the court-room.

In that room, unguessed by all who had watched and listened during the dragging trial that was now rushing swiftly to end, weird forces had been contending. In touch with the old, familiar things, but with a high-coloured unnaturalness, Harry Sevier had stood ceaseless guard over his secret, every sense and instinct on the *qui vive* to minimise the chances of recognition.

The night of his arrest, as he lay sleepless in his police-cell, he had thought out certain obvious details of the game he intended to play and had lost no time in putting them into practice. He had worn his waving hair, rather long; during his detention he reversed this habit and instead of its customary parting, brushed it straight back from his forehead. Later he took stock of personal mannerisms and altered by unrelaxing watchfulness and determination the natural register of his voice. Always his mind had retained the sense of fate that had come to him when he sat in the alcove with Paddy the Brick's

pistol clapped to his temple. Drink had driven him to that strange journey that had ended in tragedy, but had it not been, nevertheless, some over-ruling design that had brought him to Craig's house, where the unbelievable accident of his presence had saved Echo? But for that, she would now be Craig's wife, or the centre of a wretched scandal. If he held his course, and played his cards as they fell, perhaps fate would guide him still! So far the gipsy ring had brought him luck, he thought whimsically, and he had kept it on his finger.

But withal, it had been a straining interval. There had been, first, the fear that Craig would die, casting its grisly shadow across the floor; and this had woven with the dread, that never lessened, of the moment when he should recover consciousness. The first morning's newspapers had made a feature of Craig's assertion that he did not know the woman who had awaited his coming in his library; but Harry held in his mind the certainty that his own recognition must inevitably result in Echo's involvement.

He had adopted his course of silence because it was the only one open to him at the moment, but the event had justified his choice. It was the unexpected that had happened. The time-limit of the law which bounds murder had passed, and Craig was still alive. Nor had he recovered consciousness. But even with these assurances, Harry had had hourly to fight with the dread of some accidental confrontation which should pierce the screen and this dread

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had infinitely increased with the opening of the trial, when he became perforce the cynosure of hundreds of curious eyes.

But here also fate had been kind. It was now the second day of the proceedings, for Harry's personal qualities, no less than his strange pertinacity, had roused a keen professional interest in the attorney who had been assigned to defend him, and the latter had made a fight which his client, whose legal experience judged the outcome certain, would gladly have exchanged for the inept blunderings of the veriest tyro.

However, no chance encounter had betrayed him and as the District Attorney rose for his final clinching of the nail of evidence, Harry had felt a great relief that the ordeal was so nearly finished.

Almost the great danger was past! With his conviction and the passing of sentence upon him, the Judicial arm of the law would have delivered him to the Executive. Danger of publicity would be over, and Echo might be told the truth, without danger of recoil upon herself. A thousand times in his cell he had wondered how he should accomplish this. In some way it could be brought about — some safe and secret way — just how he would have leisure to decide. No one, not even Mason, his counsel, need be trusted with the significant secret that had such power to blast. She must be well instructed so that no false step could mar his plan. She must take no one into her confidence — must tell her story privately to

the Governor, who had known her from her childhood. He was a just and discreet man and Harry did not doubt the outcome. His own story could supplement hers, and after a sufficient interval, executive pardon would quietly release him. He could step back into his old niche, and all would be as before. Even if Craig recovered, he would be powerless, since an accusation could not lie against a pardoned man, and Craig would not bring a charge that was at once bootless and incredible. Nor would he wreak an empty revenge upon Echo. He had once declared that he had not known the woman in the library, and, since she was lost to him in any case, he would not hazard a public reversal of his testimony that all would unite to call dastardly. The one thing Craig valued which men in the mass could give him, aside from power and money, was his place in the social sun, and he would not risk this. In the publication of the letter, or letters, that would have involved her father, he doubtless would not have been publicly known; in this matter he would run the gauntlet of popular southern opinion and would be well aware that the act would damn him. So Harry told himself. The real story would be buried, and the world — his world and Echo's — would never know!

Thus he was thinking as he listened dully to the prosecutor's scathing *résumé*. His elbow was on the long table by which he sat, his brow in his hand, shielding his eyes from the sunlight that sent darting

arrows across the cool, dim room as the window-shade waved in the light breeze. He could not see the door at the rear of the room swing open, nor the figure of the woman who entered — to pause, momentarily confused in the quick transition from the sunny Square to the shadow of the interior.

Echo's heart was beating hard as she slipped into a vacant seat next the aisle, conscious that the man who was speaking was Meredith, whom she had met at tea the day before, and that he was closing his final speech for the prosecution. She looked about her, at the jury who seemed apathetic and a trifle bored, at the Judge who was writing perfunctorily on the pad before him, and then her gaze slipped, half-stealthily, to the long table before the bar, where the prisoner should be sitting. But though she leaned forward to look, she could not see him for the intervening figures. Then, suddenly, the deliberate, judicial utterance of the District Attorney caught her attention. He was rounding to a final period and the meaning of what he was saying smote through her self-command to the last, inner corner of her shrinking consciousness and made the room whirl about her:

"The counsel for the defence has attempted to read a romantic meaning into the obduracy with which this thief and would-be murderer has held to his policy of silence. He has invited you to believe that this silence indicates a noble desire to shield a woman's reputation. The name of a woman who

thrusts herself, unexpected and unattended, into a man's house at dead of night! The name of a woman the innocence of whose errand is effectually denied by her precipitate flight and her craven hiding!"

Echo sank back into her seat, breathless. She listened to the brief, conventional charge, saw the jurors file out, heard the stir and movement of relaxation sweep over the room, yet she was unconscious of the lapse of time. The public, open declaration had seemed to set the final flaming seal upon the incident, voicing, as if with a monster siren, the shameful meaning! She had cringed at Mrs. Moncure's smiling innuendo; now the scathing indictment was burning itself on her brain. "*A woman who thrusts herself unexpected and unattended into a man's house at dead of night!*"—the words seemed to stab her over and over like poisoned daggers. She was that—that woman! She imagined herself rising in that suffocating room and saying distinctly, "It is I he said that of—I, Echo Allen!" She saw herself on the witness-stand, heckled and badgered, faltering an unbelievable story to sceptical ears. There was rolling over her an overwhelming dread, and her hands had clenched till the nails struck purple crescents into her palms.

She became aware suddenly that the room had hushed, the jury was re-entering. She hardly heard the foreman's crisp "Guilty, your Honour!" She was trembling, there was a scent in her nostrils like

the fumes of poppies, and the room seemed to be swaying to and fro. She turned away her head, daring to look no longer.

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up!"—the clerk's metallic admonition seemed to come from far away. She strove to look now, but a swimming dizziness was upon her and the shadows of the room were turning black. She had never fainted in her life, and the thought of fainting now filled her with terror. She rose to her feet, fighting back the sickness with all her strength, stepped into the aisle, and in a moment more the fresh outer air, sweet and reviving, struck her quivering face.

Her going had made no stir, had been unnoted, perhaps, by a dozen in the court-room. She could not guess that in the instant she had risen, with blank eyes and unsteady feet, the prisoner at the bar had half-turned and for a breath his gaze had fastened upon her face.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HAUNTER OF THE SHADOW

BUT for the iron control to which he had schooled himself, Sevier, in that second, must have made a panic movement of betrayal. He dragged his eyes away instantly, his heart beating as if it must burst, as the deliberate judicial accents struck across the courtroom:

"I have no desire to say anything to add to your anxiety of mind. The rulings of the court, if they have had any bias, have not leaned to the side of the Commonwealth. There is no legal right that has not been afforded you and if you have not chosen to meet the evidence with candour it is to be presumed that it is because candour could have lent no degree of mitigation to the circumstances. The jury has found you guilty as charged, and I should be doing less than my duty, if I allowed sympathy based upon imagined facts to subtract from the full legal penalty. The judgment of this court is, therefore, that you be imprisoned in the state's penitentiary during a period of twenty years."

Harry hardly heard the pronouncement for the mental confusion that held him. Echo knew! All the time while he had been fighting back recognition,

she had known! How had she guessed? Had his voice, perhaps, that night when he had saved her, betrayed him? He remembered her white and agonised look when he had thrust her from the door of Craig's house and bade her run. A doubt, coupled with his absence from home, would have driven her, somehow or other, to discover the truth. She had been near him often, perhaps, realising the situation, conscious of what he had been striving for, knowing that only silence for a time could save them both! In that instant's view he had seen the look of suffering and sickness in her face. In these long weeks — if, indeed, she had known it so long — what an anguish of anxiety she must have been enduring!

As the voice ceased and he sat down, through the warm wave that was coursing over him, Harry felt a chilling realisation of the risk she had run in coming there. An impulsive word, an indiscreet look, and suspicion might have been roused leading to discovery. Sitting before this bar he was only an unknown criminal, a submerged "John Doe" on whom the make-shift expediency of the law spent itself. But the veil once lifted, he would be Harry Sevier, club-man and lawyer whose pleading folk had once flocked to hear, now caught in the vise of the law and proven thief and degenerate.

In the emptying room he felt the cool hand of his counsel touch his own, and followed him — with a watchful deputy-sheriff now in hand-reach — to a side door that opened into a chamber at the rear of

the court-room. On the threshold the lawyer turned to the sheriff.

"There's no hurry, Jerry," he said peevishly. "You wait out here a few minutes. The old man himself is coming. He wants to see him."

"Mr. Mason," said Sevier as the other closed the door. "I shall not pretend to thank you for your interest and kindness."

The man of briefs shrugged his shoulders. "There's nothing to thank me for," he answered briskly. "Now, if I had cleared you —"

Harry nodded. "Naturally, you couldn't do that. You were at a disadvantage."

"Thanks to you!"

"Yes, I didn't assist you much, I know."

"Didn't help me at all," came back in a growl.

"No doubt you think I might have," said Harry. "But please don't count me unresponsive. It is only that the logic of the situation appealed to me as unanswerable. But it is a privilege," he added, with the glimmer of a smile, "to have been associated with you."

Mason looked at him with a twist to his saturnine lips. "You have been my most remarkable client," he said. "It would have pleased me to have gotten you off. But unluckily for you, I'm no Harry Sevier."

It was fortunate that the face of the man beside him was turned away, or he might have seen it go white and startled. "I'm sure I lost no chance I

might have had," said the other slowly, "even though you're not Harry Sevier, whoever he is."

The other laughed shortly. "He's a lawyer in the next state. I heard him plead once. *He* didn't bother with evidence! He'd clear Judas Iscariot with that silver tongue of his! Ah, well . . . " He shrugged his shoulders again, and turned to a closed door. "I'll see if the old man is ready."

"One moment." Harry had drawn the ring with the square uncut emerald from his finger, and now he held it out. "I should consider it a favour, if you would take this — it has no particular value, I am sorry to say — as a little remembrance."

Mason turned the ring over in his hands. Under the churlish pose a guilty flush stole up his lean, eccentric face that betrayed unmistakably the friendliness and liking he had learned for the man whose plight angered and whose attitude puzzled him. "Thank you!" he said, and a sudden smile made the grim demeanour all at once soft and human. He slipped it on his finger. "Thank you! I shall be proud to keep it."

He opened the door and Sevier followed him into the room adjoining.

There, looking out of the window, the fingers of one thin hand in his plenteous blue-grey beard, the other behind him, stood the Governor of the State. Harry felt a thrill run through him. He knew the older man by sight, for they had met once casually

in the past. Had Echo already spoken? Did the other know?

"Governor," said the lawyer, "I beg to present my client, whose cause I have so poorly represented."

In the deep grey, kindly eyes that were studying him attentively, Harry saw instantly, however, that there was no hidden knowledge, and his heart, that had leaped quickly, dropped into measured beating. He bowed.

"My counsel did wonders," he said, "but the day of miracles is past."

The reply was simple enough, but the visitor unconsciously looked his surprise. He had been prepared for something in a way unusual, for Mason had employed his intimacy to inspire something of his own keen interest in his client. Face to face with the latter, the Governor understood the lawyer's puzzlement. Here was a man who had been arrested as a house-breaker and who, caught in the very act, had shot a man down. Yet he found it suddenly credible, as Mason had declared, that the man was no ordinary burglar, was indeed, or had been, a gentleman. But there were gentlemen-thieves! He met Harry's tone with noncommittal courtesy.

"You will not consider this an intrusion, I hope," he said. "My friend here was anxious that I should see you. He has been deeply concerned in your case."

"It is a pleasure," Harry replied simply. "He has been put to considerable pains, in which there is very little credit, I am afraid."

"His interest," the Governor went on, "as he has assured me, arises from a conviction that there is some hidden element in the affair that, if it had been brought out, might have put a different face upon it."

Harry bowed but did not answer.

"You have a good reason, I take it, for maintaining the silence as to yourself which my friend here finds so difficult?"

"The very best," said Harry grimly.

The Governor mused a moment. "You will pardon me, I am sure, if I ask you one other question. Have you ever been in prison?"

"No," said Harry.

"Have you committed crime — in the past?"

"As the law counts it, no."

He looked the Governor steadily in the eyes as he spoke and the other, a keen judge of men, with a knowledge, bred of long life and observation, of the workings of the human conscience, felt a strange inclination to believe. Yet for every criminal there must be a first crime. Given a good family name and the remnant of a conscience, the man's insistence could be accounted for! With a little sigh he turned to Mason.

"Shall I see you at the Castlemans to-night?" he asked as they shook hands.

"I'm dining at the Langhams," Mason replied. "It's a farewell dinner for Miss Allen."

"A charming girl, Echo!" said the Governor. "I've known her since she was a child. A farewell, did you say? Is her visit over?"

"Yes, she's off to Europe to-morrow."

The lawyer went with the Governor to the door and stood a moment looking after him as he crossed the lawn to his carriage. He did not see the look that had suddenly slipped to the face of the man standing behind him — a look mingled of sudden wonder and questioning disquiet.

To Europe! Echo? Was she going away now . . . knowing it all . . . knowing what he had passed through, what lay before him? Going without written word or secret sign to him?

Harry felt a strange sinking of the heart. It seemed to him as if a cold shadow had suddenly fallen across the room — a shadow in which lurked something vague and formless, something whose existence his faith denied, yet which stood silently staring at him with a cruel and terrifying smile.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

SOME miles beyond the skirt of the city, on the dusty highway, stood a vast wall of stone built four-square, along whose top, seen breast-high, men in dingy *khaki* patrolled back and forth with rifles on their shoulders. Fronting the road was a great barred gate, with an arched top, set in the wall. This opened on a narrow paved court at one side of which was a two storied frame building, whose door was marked with the word "warden."

Before this door the next afternoon Harry Sevier stood with a sheriff. The latter knocked and a heavy-featured man came out. "Well, Warden," said the sheriff, "I've brought you another boarder. Here's his papers."

The other examined the documents, took a fountain-pen from his pocket and signed one — a form of receipt — and handed it back. "All right," he said briefly, and rushing open the door, motioned the new arrival to enter.

When Harry emerged, an hour later, under the care of a uniformed turn-key, he wore trousers and jacket of coarse fulled cloth with horizontal stripes of black and yellowish-grey — the badge of the con-

vict. Under his visored cap his crisp black hair had been clipped close to the skin. And in the upper office a trusty who acted as clerk was filling in on an indexed card the physical measurements which, with the number he wore on a leathern strap about his upper arm, constituted the formula by which hereafter was to be known the man who had once been Harry Sevier.

In the centre of the great walled space reared an ancient circular structure of brick. It was like a huge bee-hive. His conductor led Harry to a compartment on the lower tier and unlocked an iron door. "This is yours, 239," he said.

Harry entered. He heard the door clang behind him and the footsteps retire down the stone corridor. The light from a barred window struck full into his eyes and for a moment he did not see that another figure, in the same dingy stripes, sat on the edge of the narrow bunk, looking at him out of small, red-rimmed eyes.

The occupant rose slowly, thrusting a grimy hand through a shock of sand-coloured hair, and stared hard at the newcomer. Then he uttered a howl of evil mirth and recognition.

"Smoke of the devil!" he shouted. "If it ain't the youngster me and Towler had behind the portuary! Ho-ho! I saw by the papers they'd nabbed you. And to think the geezer swore it was you that plugged him! They didn't get me — not that time! I'd be out still if I hadn't tried to lift a reticule on a

street-car. It was my record that did it for me then. Well, we're pals now, old horse, and we'll celebrate it right!"

He thrust his arm beneath the rough blanket, brought out a flask, and uncorked it with his teeth.

"It's the real stuff," he said. "Towler slips it to me — good old pal! He's got one of the guards 'fixed'! Here — drink hearty!" With a hoarse laugh he thrust it into Harry's face.

Harry's eyes had been fixed on his with a curious intensity. In that startling moment, as the fumes of the liquor penetrated his nostrils, a lurid sequence had flashed to him. This man he had once betrayed by a base surrender to appetite; now in antic irony, it was this man's crime that had betrayed him, Harry Sevier, to the same dilemma and a like shameful penalty. And here was dangled before him the hideous badge and symbol of his downfall!

He seized the wrist of the outstretched hand with a grasp like steel, and the flask smashed against the bars of the window. Then he hurled the other from him across the narrow cell.

His cell-mate clung to the bunk across which he had fallen, and stared at Harry with a look of slow malevolence. He licked his lips.

"I'll fix you for that!" he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MAN IN THE WHEELED CHAIR

ECHO sat under the Botticelli blue of a perfect afternoon on the terrace of the Hotel Splendid in Nice. Through the hot, bright air, set in the purple creases of the hazeless hills, she could see tinted villas drowsing in golden gardens aflame with flowers, and below under the dizzying sunlight beyond the long esplanade, tiny swells spilled over the pearly beech like molten sapphire.

The past months had been packed with new sights and sounds. There had been the ocean passage, with all the gaiety that mill-pond weather and a total absence of *mal de mer* evokes, a leisurely motor trip through the northern counties of England, shopping and theatre-going in Paris, and then a final fortnight on the Riviera. From the first day at sea, when the dimming shores of home had slipped away into the vaporous distance across the swinging, grey-green heave, Echo had thrown herself eagerly into the new experiences. It had seemed to her at first as though she was leaving behind all her pain and problem and flying whither the dogging ghosts could not follow. From time to time she felt a wave of that shame that had overwhelmed her as she sat in the court-room. When she reflected, she felt astonishment at her own

temerity — at the morbid curiosity which had impelled her to witness the rehearsal of an episode whose very memory thrilled her with pain and dread. But at length this, too, had faded. She had told herself that Harry would have returned before her and that all would again be well between them. With all her power she had striven to thrust the pain and apprehension from the mind and amid new and varying scenes she had partially succeeded.

But though the acute strain and distress, the piteous terror had dulled, her heart ached always with its burden, and there were many times when all of Mrs. Spottiswoode's effervescent moods could not call forth response. Across the fairest scenes the ghosts, uncalled, would thrust themselves, and in her brain a mocking voice would whisper —

"You will never tell him! You will never dare! There will always be a secret between you! You will be deceiving him — all your life. For if you told him the truth — the whole truth — would he believe you? The letters for which you made that visit, even if you could show them, are ashes now. And even if he believed in the necessity that drove you to win them from Craig, what might he imagine had been the price! You know what the world would think: you heard it in the court-room. He would think the same thing! You were in Craig's house, alone, that midnight — and you will never dare tell him! Can you say to him, 'It was *I* who was in Cameron Craig's library! *I* was the mys-

terious woman the police were searching for — *I whom you love!* ' ? ”

The sneering voices were whispering in her ear to-night, as she sat looking out across the blended harmonies of sky and sea, her wistful face bent beneath the soft halo of her hair.

There welled up in her with fresh force the aching resentment, the sick anger and rebellion against the sardonic fate that had so enmeshed her. Why should Craig have ever seen and desired her? Why should his fancy not have fallen upon some other woman? Yet, had that been so, her father's name would have been ruined! That, at least, had not befallen. If only she had not written that note to Harry! So she reflected, not knowing that that fateful note itself had been the key to another series of incidents which had in fact wrought for her salvation — so curiously interwoven is the mystic fabric that man calls chance. By that note, she told herself, she had thrust his love from her. Would anything less than the whole truth bring it back? And in any case, if she did not tell him the whole, would she ever be safe in that love? For Craig could betray her if he regained his faculties. A single word could overwhelm her. There was that lost night when she had been believed to be at her aunt's — a dropped stitch in time's weave which might unravel the whole! If he recovered Craig would hold her happiness in his grasp as surely as he had once held her father's honour.

The cogent reasons that had influenced Harry in his speculation on the same subject had been based on his keen masculine observation and familiarity with Craig's type; Echo had only her knowledge of his relentless passion and lack of scruple, and her instinct was clouded by long anxiety and fear. She had lately striven to banish from her mind the idea that he might recover, but to-night it was upon her with strange force. A baleful thought thrust itself into her mind, an incarnate temptation: *If Craig would only die!* As it came to her she felt her face blush, and she shrank, feeling that a wicked thing had found lodgment in her soul; but it came again and again.

A little group of people who had arrived that morning had issued from the dining-room and now were seated about one of the small tables on the terrace drinking their coffee — two men, one elderly, one younger, a handsome woman and a girl. They continued the conversation begun inside — evidently a discussion of some one who had been on the train. All at once the lady touched the speaker beside her on the arm.

"Hush!" she cautioned. "There he is now!"

The voices stilled. Glancing around Echo saw that a wheeled-chair was being pushed onto the far end of the terrace. A man sat in it, huddled in a steamer-rug.

"Is he married?" asked the lady, after a pause.

"No," replied the elderly man. "He has no

family or near relatives. The men with him are a nurse and a secretary. They say he is very rich."

"Poor fellow!" she exclaimed. "What a dreadful thing! Death is immensely preferable, of course, to life under such conditions. Where are they taking him?"

"To Hungary, I believe. There's a celebrated authority on brain-surgery in Buda-Pesth. The surgeons think it's pressure on some nerve-centre, and the case calls for the particular operation that is this chap's specialty. It's a forlorn hope, I imagine."

"I don't know," said the younger man, lighting a cigarette. "They do marvellous things nowadays. And anyway, if it fails, it can't be any worse for the patient. As it is, he has no mind at all — no speech, no memory, nothing!"

Echo turned her head; there was a fierce little smile on her lips. So here was another! Had he, too, like the one of whom she had been thinking, been overtaken by a righteous Nemesis in the moment of evil triumph? And somewhere, perhaps, was there a woman to whom his death would be a gladness and a relief?

The lady looked toward the wheeled-chair. "How was the injury caused?" she asked interestedly.

"He was shot," said the elderly man. "Shot by a burglar. I remember reading of it in the newspapers at the time."

Echo started. A little tremor ran over her. The scarf she held slipped from her hand.

"It seems a pity sometimes," went on the voice, "that the law must graduate its penalties so nicely. Here is a man who, to all intents and purposes, was murdered. If he doesn't recover, his is a living death. Yet because he continues to breathe, the most that can be given to the scoundrel who shot him is a term of imprisonment. He ought to have been hanged!"

The girl beside her pushed back her chair petulantly. "Oh, let's *do* something!" she cried. "I want to get him out of my mind. I sat where I had to look at him in the train all day. It's too horrible! Fancy having to be like that, not being able to walk or talk or even to feed one's self! I want to go to the Casino and see something *funny*!"

When the sound of their voices had died away in the corridor, Echo rose from her seat and walked along the terrace, quite to the end, where stood the wheeled-chair. On a bench near by an attendant was immersed in a newspaper.

Then she turned and looked at the pallid, vacuous face above the steamer-rug.

Yes — it was Cameron Craig.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LONE BATTLE

DURING those months Harry's visible life had been turning in an endless cycle of new-gained habit that ruled with vicious and numbing precision the huge conglomerate of which he was but a single atom — a bitter, dragging treadmill in which he was constrained to tramp steadily round and round with the hands of the clock, marking time, as it were, in a painful void that changed with mocking reverberations.

The spectre that had smiled its cruel smile at him from the shadow in the little chamber back of the court-room had never left him. He had thrust it from him with all his strength, but it had come again and again to chuckle through the darkness.

"She!" it had sneered. "She for whom you risked and suffered so much! She whose fine courage you counted on — who you dreamed would rush to your defence, at any cost to herself! You need not have been afraid. She would have risked nothing. She cared for you — yes. But she cares a thousand times more for her place in the world's opinion. Why, she would have married Craig — *married* him! — rather than face a reflected shame from a story affecting her father. So much reputa-

tion means to her! Here you are in your stripes, a convict, and *she knows it!* She knew all along! She doesn't guess you saw her in the court-room: she didn't mean you to, of course. How she must have suffered from fear that you would drag her into it! No doubt she is afraid you may repent and call on her now to help you. Perhaps that is why she has gone abroad. That is the real Echo Allen! That is the woman you have loved!"

Should he call to her now, when she had left him to this suffering, giving him no little word of trust or gratitude? A painful fiery pride rose up in him. Not if his flesh was torn by red-hot pincers! Not in endless years, though every day were a separate hell, till he died! Never — never — never!

Seared by pride, tortured by despair, with the black agony of doubt clinging to him like a coat-of-mail, memory dragged him backward through infernos of suffering, thrusting its searching fingers into each cranny of his mind, mocking him with shifting pictures cruelly incongruous, that like a *camera obscura* turned and turned about a single focus — a grey old porch with Echo's figure leaning against a pillar and he looking up into her face. As though he had been a separate entity he saw himself moving through a thousand significant scenes of the flame-swept past — the long-gone, dead and buried yet living past — with her! And across these flitting outlines there stamped itself the forbidding legend that his ghostly guide showed Dante. . . . *Lasciate Og-*

ni speranza! By his own choice he had opened a bottomless chasm between the then and now, between the Harry Sevier he had been and the nameless convict branded by the righteous law, and this chasm was impassible and enduring. Ten years of oblivion, of loathsome existence under a number, of comradeship with felons, an interminable blank unlighted by one glimpse of joy! Years in which, at home, the mystery of his disappearance would pass from a nine-days'-wonder to a diminishing speculation, a vague curiosity, and at length to forgetfulness. His life, with its multiple ambitions, its hopes and strivings — its love — had been spilled like water into sand; there remained only the useless vessel, empty and dishonoured.

Time and again he experienced abrupt lapses into the blackest pit of despair, when he grappled with an aching desire to be quit of the puzzle of life, and by any one of a dozen means which lay at his hand, to leap into freedom. But there was in him something deep-lying and adamant which forbade this solution.

Meanwhile time, after a fashion, went on. He breathed, ate and slept; he saw the dawn look in at his narrow window and the silken blue dusk drawn across its bars; his hands automatically performed mechanical tasks, as did the hundreds of others about him; and gradually, out of the very iteration of these homely things grew a passive equanimity, destitute of human comfort yet bringing with it a

kind of numb acquiescence in which, though all unconsciously, his feet were feeling for new foot-hold on the submerged highway of life. And at length normal feeling, though dazed and bewildered, crept again to the surface; he was once more conscious of the sun and air, of the scent of green growing things that the breeze now and then wafted over the masonry, of the grey pigeons that pecked crumbs in the court-yard, and of the multitudinous human life that throbbed about him.

In all these months Paddy the Brick had been his cell-mate. By day in the shop, that rumbled with the clacking din of the tireless shoe-machines, they were separated. But they marched shoulder to breast in the loathed lock-step, they sat side by side at dinner and supper, and the iron bunks on which they slept — Harry on the upper one — were but a few feet apart. During the first days, while they were together in the cell, the other had watched him glumly and suspiciously, speaking only when he must and then morosely, so that Harry had wondered dully whether that whirl of rage in which he had smashed the flask of whisky against the window-bars had not further embittered his lot by an irreparable enmity.

More than once, by the devious means known to such places, Paddy the Brick had procured whisky, and this — though he risked offering no more to his companion but drank it secretly in his bunk at night — had put Harry through other bitter tests of self-

control. For the wilful license of the day on which he had ceased to be Harry Sevier had granted fresh and terrible power to the cringing thing that had been mastered and manacled, and the fight he had fought out in that long year Harry had had again to renew, and now without the zest of reward. Again and again, as he sat in his cell, or fed the pungent leathern strips into the clacking shoe-machines in the shop, without warning the demon of thirst had swooped upon him, making his dry throat ache with uncontrollable longing, his palms tingle with itching desire: and at times, when he awoke gasping with the reeking fumes in his nostrils, and heard the gurgle of the liquor in the dark, he had fought with a strenuous desire to fling himself bodily upon his companion and snatch the drink to his own arid lips — fought till the struggle turned him faint with anger, disgust and self-contempt.

What lent him in these bitter months the strength for this unequal struggle? Most of all the knowledge that the appetite which he now grappled with in himself, was the patron Genius of that house of Pain. He had learned it from his fellows there, in whose faces alcohol had set its recognisable marks, its baleful brands of ownership. He knew it from a score of dismal histories related by his incorrigible cell-mate, daily allusions, the famished eagerness with which the surreptitious flask was passed from hand to hand. The Spirit of Drink had seemed to him at length to sprawl, a huge,

lethargic incubus, over that tortured congeries of crime. Till slowly, very slowly — as human feeling had earlier come to him out of his blankness and torpor — there had dawned in him a mute consciousness of a victory over himself that was to be enduring. The conquest he had thought he had made in that first year of studied avoidance had been no true one. Under stress of anger, grief and resentment, it had fallen in shameful and utter defeat. The real victory that he knew now, had come to him in that prison garb, when black despair had sat by his side through long months — the fruit of a strength born of familiar hand-touch with evil temptation and a hatred of the tempter.

As time went on, the surly mood of his cell-mate had grown less difficult, had even softened to a sneering tolerance.

"You're improving!" he said one day with a smirk. "So you're making up to the Gospel-Sharp, eh?"

It was a Sunday, when the shops were empty and silent, and the long grey-black serpentine, with its hitching lock-step, had wound to the Chapel for the weekly platitudes and then back to the clammy, wintry dormitory, to drop its human links at their numbered cells. That day for the first time, the plodding, oleaginous chaplain had noted the new figure in the stolid ranks and had stopped to speak to him — a commonplace to which Harry had responded with a mere word.

"You'd better make up to the Warden!" Paddy the Brick continued. "He's the cock-of-the-walk here. I'd like to smash that oily face of his!"

"I've nothing against him," replied Harry evenly. "He does what he's here to do."

"He'd better keep his nose in his office," said the other darkly. "He'll walk through the shops once too often! I know a man around the corner who'd give his neck to 'get' him—he's a lifer, and nothing makes much difference to him!"

He crossed the narrow cell as he spoke, and sitting on one of the three-legged stools that constituted the cell's only movable furniture, took a bent tin spoon from under his jacket and began to tap upon the wall. Harry had sometimes seen him at this occupation—a kind of crude signalling he had thought it. Now, however, some rhythm in the sound caught him, reminding him of the click of the keys in a telegraph office. "What is that you are doing?" he asked, as the other stopped.

"Doing?" Paddy the Brick turned his narrow eyes over his shoulder. "I've been having a chat with an old pal of mine in the upper tier. That's what."

"Talking?"

"Yes. It's the prison-wireless. Didn't you ever hear of that?"

"No."

The other rose and pulled away the blanket from the foot of his bunk. There in the whitewashed

wall was a double row of minute scratches. "That's the alphabet," he said. "It's mighty handy — we work it by relay. I can call up any cell on this side in fifteen minutes. Better learn it," he added jeeringly. "You'll have plenty of time!"

Harry's gaze turned back to the little barred-window with its meagre square of blue. The time he had been there was to be measured only by months, yet how century-long had dragged the leaden-footed procession! His painful reverie was broken by Paddy the Brick's voice, jarring and malicious:

"Ever read the Bible?"

The other had taken the small dingy volume — the sole book the place afforded — from its shelf, and was lying on his back on his bunk, his eyes peering over its rim.

"Yes," answered Harry, slowly. "Why?"

"I've found one good thing in it: '*Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne.*' Ho-ho!" he chuckled.

"Reckon I'll ask old Coffin-Face to preach on it next Sunday in Chapel. I'd sure enjoy it. I had a lawyer once — *damn him!*"

The flare of evil passion in the closing epithet seemed to Harry like a wicked spurt of flame from some sudden crack in cooling lava, leaping out to sear him. His face was turned away — toward the little square of barred window — and his voice was hoarser than usual, as he asked:

"Why do you hate him so?"

Paddy the Brick hurled the Bible into the corner with an imprecation. He rose to a sitting posture, his features working.

"Because he did it for me!" he said. "He might have cleared me . . . and he didn't try. And I never took the money they said I stole — never, so help me! It was a put-up job. They 'planted' the stuff on me, when I was drunk. It was a pay-day and I knew they were up to something, for they'd sworn they'd drive me out of the logging-camp — and yet I hadn't sense enough to keep sober!" He gave a harsh and bitter laugh, and his voice rose. "But it was my lawyer friend that really did the business! He was a dead swell — one of your la-de-das with money and automobiles — that played at lawyering. They told me he was a great man and I was fool enough to believe them. What did he care for my case — it was a little one to him! I was nothing but a lumber-jack! Why should he soil his kid gloves with me?"

He turned to Harry's white face a livid countenance. "So now I'm here," he finished, "and I don't give a rip if I am, either!"

"*Woe unto you also, ye lawyers!*" Parallel with the wholesale indictment another text in that self-same book was flashing through Harry's mind: "*For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.*" Was that, after all, no

trite generality applicable to a hypothetical hereafter, but a thing true in the minute and multinomial affairs of the present? Did chance, or fate — or whatever the human mind called the great *Deus ex Machinâ* — watch somewhere, with hand upon the lever, adjusting the nice balance to the subtle requirements of some occult law of retribution that, though hidden, was yet as certain as gravitation?

As Harry saw the reddened eyes glowing with hatred, the curving fingers, the crouching figure, he said to himself, "This is my work — mine and whisky's. He was a simple woodman who laboured six days of the week and on the seventh traded half his wages for 'moonshine' from some illicit mountain still. Whisky set his feet in the toils, yet but for me he might have lived there forever in the timber, treading his narrow groove like a blind horse on a ferry, not one whit worse than his fellows, with no agonised conscience, a simple product of his environment. But I — and whisky — fastened the bonds upon him. I did it. I sent him here. I gave him hatred of society, the warfare that has already marked him with the mark of the beast. This is what I did. And now I am plucked up from my place and planted here beside him, as soiled in the eyes of the world as he! Is it because I was the instrument of his demoralisation that the tables have now been turned? — because he who takes the sword shall perish by the sword? And in the last great evening-up, is it written that I

shall become even as he? — that bars and chains shall have their will of me and I emerge at last, like this incorrigible *ruiné*, hard, debased, besotted, beyond hope or redemption in the world?" He shuddered. Better even that that shot in the library had gone home — that he now lay, innocent as he was, with the red mark on his throat, down in the horrible quick-lime!

He rose, and with his hands gripping the bars of the open door, drew a long breath. No! whatever this pent-house did to him, it should never drag him down! He would take his medicine. For what, in his egregious folly and egotism, he had done, he would pay — if fate demanded, to the uttermost farthing. But out of its prison his soul, sometime, should come unblanched, and unabashed!

CHAPTER XXX

THE GIPSY RING

THE chill touch of autumn was in the air when the big steamer that brought Mrs. Spottiswoode and Echo home, crept up the bay to her wharf in the teeming North River. They arrived at daylight and the early morning found them safe aboard a Pullman rolling southward.

Looking out across the filmy glory of the October fields and the woods in their golden regalia epauletted in red, Echo thought of the day she had sailed away. She had been wretched then, and with all the tonic of fresh scenes and the savour of change, was she not as wretched now? For no letter from home had chronicled Harry Sevier's return, and moreover the knowledge that Craig had been taken half around the world to test the greatest surgical skill the planet afforded, had made his recovery, with all it might imply for her, an imminent possibility.

As she followed Mrs. Spottiswoode into the dining-car for luncheon, a lank, familiar form sprang up from a table.

"Mr. Malcolm!" she cried, and found both her hands instantly swallowed in a pair of big palms.

He was an extraordinary man, this Thomas Mal-

colm, whom his intimates dubbed, affectionately, "Tom." His father had begun life brilliantly, had begun to make a name and place for himself in professional life, when he had yielded to the vice of drinking, had speedily sunk himself in poverty, and had died in some slum corner wretched and unredeemed, leaving behind him a widow and a boy of ten who, with grim determination, had set himself to earn a living for both. He had but just begun to succeed in this when disease, its seeds sown in privation, took his mother from him. By dint of night-work he had gained a common-school education and had tutored himself through a southern university. At twenty-five he had founded an obscure Mission in the city which had known his father's disgrace, where for thirty years he had devoted himself to work among the rum-sodden and depraved. There was none so besotted as to be turned from his door; he was a familiar figure in the night-court and a welcome weekly visitor at the Penitentiary, few of whose inmates he did not know personally. At fifty-five no man was more beloved in the community in which he laboured, and most of all was he valued and respected by those who knew his history, and understood how the hatred of liquor had become to the boy a consuming fire that had driven him to this life of undeviating self-denial and strenuous conflict with the most sordid of vices.

Looking down at Echo from his great height, gaunt, raw-boned and with a saturnine twinkle in his

cavernous eyes, his homely sallow face softened to a wonderful smile. "Why!" he said. "It's a monstrous time since we've met, my dear!" and to Mrs. Spottiswoode — "I saw your names on the passenger-list in the paper this morning, but I thought New York would have kept you at least a week."

"Not me!" she returned. "We took in all the new plays in London and spent all our money in Paris. I've no ambition now above my winter roses!" She extended her hand to Malcolm's companion.

"How do you do, Mr. Mason? I'm beginning to think you two men are desperate conspirators. Last year in New York I saw you both together."

Malcolm laughed. "A misguided philanthropist once left a part of his estate to my Mission, and Mason, here, is the legal executor. *Verbum sat.*"

"I hope that is Latin for 'Do sit at our table.' The car is so full, and I never could ride backward! Thank you, so much!" She sat down and bent her smart lorgnette upon the menu-card. "What shall we order, Echo?"

"Anything but the 'fried Chicken, Virginia style,'" said Mason gloomily. "It's supposed to be what that waiter has on his tray there. It's a crime and a swindle."

"Don't mind Mason," interposed Malcolm. "He's a dyspeptic. When I get to be his age —"

"You did," said the other viciously, "five years ago."

"—I'll be a vegetarian," finished the other. "Cheer up, Mason, and have a potato." He turned to Echo: "I know a girl in my town who's mighty keen to see you."

"Nancy Langham!"

He nodded. "She counts on having you down for Thanksgiving week. I hope she'll succeed. I'm giving a great 'spread' down at the Mission, and I want you girls to show me how to decorate the place. You will, then, eh? I haven't forgotten how you and Nancy helped me out last Christmas!" He reached over and patted her hand. "I do like to let it soak into Poverty Terrace that I really keep company with 'dee quality,' as the darkies say!"

Mrs. Spottiswoode looked at him curiously. "How frivolous and selfish we must all seem to you, who give up your life to such people!" she said. "I've heard so much about your work, Mr. Malcolm, especially in the prisons. I think you are wonderful. I should know how to talk to a Martian better than to a criminal. Don't you find it hard to get into sympathy with them?"

His smiling face turned serious. "'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind,'" he quoted. "You remember your Bunyan? I always say to myself, 'There, but for the lack of a sufficient temptation, goes Thomas Malcolm!' Dear Lady, there is many a man in the Penitentiary who would be a churchwarden to-day but for bad environment and good whisky."

"And the law's mistakes," added Mason, sardonically. He had been turning over on his finger a ring with a square green stone, and Echo had been wondering vaguely where she had seen such a ring before. "I know a man who's in for ten years, and I'd stake my life he's no more guilty than I am."

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed Mrs. Spottiswoode, and Malcolm observed with wicked innocence: "I wonder who could have defended him!"

The other smiled grimly at the thrust. "Oh, he was guilty enough according to the evidence. But he was innocent, for all of that. He is the man who was accused of shooting Cameron Craig."

The blood flew to Echo's face and she bent her head over her salad. She felt as though she had strayed unwittingly into an ambush where all the old dread and terror from which she had fled had sprung again upon her.

"But," said Mrs. Spottiswoode, "I thought Craig himself identified him."

Mason sniffed. "Craig was in no condition to identify anybody. I saw the man and talked with him, day after day, for weeks. He was no criminal — why, his very look gave the theory the lie!"

A keen, thriving wonder crossed Echo's thought at the blunt assertion. That livid face back of the spitting revolver hung before her mental sight with strange vividness — the surly, wicked lips, the low brow and narrow eyes. How was it possible that such a countenance could assume at wont a look of

innocency that would deceive a lawyer, even against damning evidence, into a belief that he was a victim of circumstances?

"What is your theory of the shooting, then?" asked Mrs. Spottiswoode, interestedly.

The lawyer was silent a moment, drawing little circles on the cloth with his fork. "I haven't a wholly satisfactory one," he said at length, slowly. "But I don't believe he did it. Craig, it is certain, had a *rendezvous* with a woman, and the woman saw the shooting. I believe her testimony would have proven that the man who was tried and convicted was not the man who did it. That fact disposed of, I believe he could have shown, if he had chosen to, that he had no connection with the burglars, and would have been acquitted."

"*Cherchez la femme!*" murmured the lady.

"Yes. She would not come forward."

Mrs. Spottiswoode looked at Malcolm. "Have you seen him?" she asked.

"No, I've been in New Orleans for three months. But I hope to begin my visits at the Penitentiary very soon, and I'm looking forward to meeting him."

"You'll agree with me, I'll bet a hat!" said Mason. "By the way" — he held up his hand — "he gave me this ring, the day he was sentenced."

Echo felt every nerve suddenly tighten. For it had come to her in a flash where she had seen that ring's counterpart: it had been on the finger of the masked burglar on that horrible midnight in Craig's

library — when he had held out to her the letters from the safe! Her heart began to beat suffocatingly. "*Take them and go — go instantly!*" — she seemed to hear the tense command strike across the car. A thrill ran over her. Was the ring a kind of badge, a sign of their guilty calling? Or could it be that the man who was being tried was *not* the man who had shot Craig — but the other, the one who had saved her?

She began to tremble, for another thought stabbed her. If this was so, how could she honourably keep silence? The instant question touched her conscience, her quick sense of justice and duty, with sudden insistence. But for the spoilers themselves, she was the only witness of that deed in the library. Craig — so narrow had been for him that instant of observation — might have been mistaken. But not she! The very fright and horror of the moment had indelibly fixed the shooter's face upon her mind. Suppose Mason's hypothesis were correct — suppose he had been no burglar, but an honourable man, caught, as she had been, in a web of circumstance. In the crisis he had acted as a gentleman, had thought of her before himself. Instead of flying with the others, he had lingered to do that generous deed for her. What if it were because of that he had been taken! If so, what a debt she owed him!

It came to her suddenly that she must be *certain*. Never again could she know peace of soul till she knew the truth. If the man in the Penitentiary was

indeed the man who had shot Craig, well and good. If not . . .

She turned her head, for Malcolm was speaking to her. "When you come to Nancy's you must let me take you both out to see these *protégés* of mine that have to be shut up for the good of their souls. Wouldn't you like to, eh?"

She thought he must hear the beating of her pulse. "Would — don't they resent being stared at?" she faltered.

"Bless your heart!" he said, with one of his bear-like laughs. "It's good for them. They don't get a squint at roses and sunshine every day! A sight like you two girls will make them want to get out, and keep them on their best behaviour, so as to earn all the commutation good marks bring! I'll get the Warden to take us through the shops. That's the most interesting part."

"I must be quite certain!" The words seemed singing themselves over in a banal refrain that sounded through the stir and rumble of the station, mingling with 'Lige's hearty voice of welcome, and her father's loving greeting as he lifted her carefully from the car step.

"You're a lot better? *Sure?*" he queried anxiously, as he held both her hands tight in his.

"Sure!" she smiled. "We've had a *wonderful* time. I couldn't begin to tell you about it in my letters. But I'm glad to be home just the same!

How are mother and Chilly? Mr. Malcolm was on the train — there he is now, waving his hand from the window. Did the wireless tell you we lost a propeller-blade two days out? ”

The dusk flowed over them in violet waves as they drove homeward and she laughed and talked gaily, with her hand clasped in his under the carriage-robe, the horses prancing and curvetting in the keen October air. Once, at a crossing, she put out her hand and touched the coachman's arm.

“Take Main Street, 'Lige,” she directed. “I'd like to see how it looks.”

As he swung into the broader thoroughfare, her father said, “You're looking at the new bank building. You see it's nearly done.”

But she was really looking beyond, at a four-storied office-front, on whose second floor the windows of a suite showed in chaste, golden letters the legend, “Henry Sevier, Attorney-at-Law.” The windows were blank and dusty, and their blinds were drawn.

“Why, you're shivering!” said her father suddenly, and drew the robe more closely about her.

She smiled at him.

“No,” she said, “but I think I'm just a little tired. Drive faster, 'Lige. I—I want to get home.”

CHAPTER XXXI

AMBUSH

L YING in his bunk Harry awoke to the consciousness of another bleak dawn. The morning waking was always a pain to him, for in sleep the barriers fell away and the mind fared forth along the free, sweet highways of memory. He did not open his eyes at once, but he felt the rasp of the coarse blanket at his throat, smelled the cold clamminess of the granite floor, and realised by a thousand reminders of the sharpened senses that another round of the treadmill awaited him. He remembered drearily that to-morrow would be Thanksgiving Day. In the world outside it was the time of yellow maples and the red of the frost-kissed sumac, of wild grapes purpling in the thickets and clumps of alder blooms in the fence-corners — of blazing hearths and good fellowship!

Mingling with the stir of reawakening life in the corridors there sounded a light *tap-tap* — the tattoo of a tin spoon against the stone.

Without moving he opened his eyes. Paddy the Brick was up and dressed — if donning the cheap flannel shirt, the striped jacket and trousers, might be called dressing — and, stooped in the corner of

the cell, was industriously at work with the 'prison-wireless.' For a while Harry watched him curiously; then suddenly his ear made out a word. For in time he had taken his cell-mate's sneering advice, and because the busy mind, turned too long upon itself, must perforce occupy itself with something extraneous, had mastered the code that was scratched in the white-washed wall. He had a retentive memory, sharpened now by disuse, and the tiny *tap-tap* that he had learned to distinguish through the muffling masonry, though he never used it as a means of communication, had soon become an open book to him. Strange things he had heard in this manner — furtive, uncouth gossip of that under-world, which, although much was couched in an unknown *argot* and was meaningless to him, had yet served in a way to lighten the unendurable emptiness. The word he had caught now was "visitors."

In another moment Harry was listening intently, for the sounds were spelling something which instinct told him was wickedly suggestive though he could not guess its purport. "Warden . . . to-day," tapped the signalled code, "—take . . . number nine . . . machine . . . your . . . chance —"

Whatever else might have been said was blotted by the whirring clang of the electric gong in the central corridor. Through the great lamelliform bee-hive it sent its waking clamour, the signal for rising to the new day's tasks. With the sound Paddy the Brick thrust the stolen utensil out of sight and

shot a stealthy glance at the upper bunk, but its occupant had apparently just awakened.

All the ensuing morning, as he rubbed himself down in the plenteous cold water which the spigot provided, and did his share in the cleaning of the bare cell — while he sopped his brown bread in the weak breakfast coffee, and presently tramped in the long file to the shop to feed the voracious machines with the clean-smelling leather — all the while Harry's brain was busy with the message he had heard. "Visitors?" Occasionally visitors had passed through the shops — panging reminders to him of the world outside. Perhaps in some devious way the other had heard that some would come to-day. But turn and twist the rest of the words how he might, they meant nothing. Dinner time came, with its lifting break in the unvarying monotony, then the long lock-step back to the shop and its labour.

The work had come to be far more welcome to him than the cell, with the partner to whose society he was chained. The hum and click and throb stole his thought, and the automatic movements, in which he had become an adept, soothed his aching mind. For several hours this afternoon the mechanical occupation absorbed him and he worked on, noting little about him. Then, all at once, as he turned to pick up the bit of cotton waste with which he kept the steel clutches of the machine before him free from dust, he became conscious of something unaccus-

tomed. His own machine was number eight. At the one adjoining, number nine, which was next to the broad middle way bisecting the shop, Paddy the Brick was wont to stand. Now, however, another man was in his stead. At near view Harry recognised him as one whose place was further along, next the wall, and glancing in that direction he saw that Paddy the Brick was running the other's machine.

The meaning of the "wireless" message leaped instantly to his mind. When, after dinner, the long line had broken and distributed its units, the man had taken number nine, and the exchange had been effected so quickly and naturally that it had been thus far unnoted by the watchful Superintendent sitting moveless on the raised platform at the end of the aisle, his revolvers on the desk before him. What did the transfer mean? Harry wondered. The men nearby worked on, but they seemed to be restive, waiting for something, with a subdued excitement and anxiety. As he glanced sideways toward the newcomer, at the haggard parchment visage, lean and ashen with the pallor of long confinement, he noted that the other kept his back to the platform and his head studiously bent over his machine, and there darted to Harry's recollection what Paddy the Brick had said one day to him — of the "lifer" and his hatred of the warden. The tapped message of the morning had spoken of the latter, too. "Your

... chance!" Could that have meant the chance to "get" the man he hated?

As if in answer to the startled thought, there sounded voices behind him. He looked over his shoulder. The Warden himself was entering the door at the end of the shop, and there were visitors with him.

Then instantly every conscious thought save one fled from him and he clapped a hand to his mouth to stifle a cry. With the Warden were three figures, a man and two women, and the women were Echo Allen and Nancy Langham.

A sickness like that of death rushed upon him. That she could come there — careless of the chance that she might see him in these loathsome surroundings — a common convict, with cropped hair and striped clothing, marked with all the badges of the jailbird — smote him with an unendurable pain. She, who knew that he had loved her — to see him in this guise! All the agony he had suffered rolled over him anew, intensified a thousand-fold. He pulled his cap-visor low over his eyes and snatching up the bit of oily waste, drew it across his cheek, smudging his face from chin to brow.

The little group of four had paused near the desk of the Superintendent, the Warden smilingly pointing out to the two girls the details of the work. Harry's fingers performed their task by sheer instinct; for his very life he had not been able to help

stealing a swift sidelong look at Echo's face, pale beneath its russet cloud of hair, and he distinguished with a fierce bitterness the jaded shadows that had crept beneath her eyes, tokens that belied her conventionally polite show of interest. So, though she condemned him to this torture, she too suffered!

Could he have looked beneath that controlled exterior he would have discerned a pain and dread to match his own. With that luncheon in the dining-car a sense of fate had fallen upon her, heavy and irrevocable, as though some huge weight was closing down. The whip of conscience had driven her to this day's quest. If the law had erred — if, in truth an innocent man, as Mason believed, lay under condemnation — it was for lack of her testimony: the thought had laid upon her sensitive mind a new sense of guilty responsibility. She must be certain, beyond peradventure. The visit to the Evelands for the Thanksgiving season had furnished the opportunity and the round of the Penitentiary with Malcolm had arranged itself. It had been easy to advert to Mason's belief in the innocence of the prisoner he had defended, and it had seemed natural enough for her to ask the Warden to point out the man as they went through the shops. They had now entered the room in which he had told her the man worked — she was standing on the threshold of the knowledge she feared.

She started at the Warden's voice, close to her ear, above the rasping clamour of the machines:

"The last row, at the end. The middle machine — that's the one."

With a quick intake of her breath she looked where he pointed. The colour faded from her cheeks. Doubt — if she had clung to doubt — was ended now! The man who had started with levelled pistol from behind the curtain of Craig's library had been short and stocky and round-shouldered. The side-face of the distant prisoner at whom she was now looking with such painful intensity, under the shadow of his cap-brim showed smudged with oil and dust; but his shoulders were broad and straight and his frame tall and lithe. Whatever the law said, this man was *not* the man who had shot Craig! She alone could swear it!

She felt suddenly a kind of terror of the place. She touched Malcolm's arm. "I've seen enough — please! Could we turn back now?"

The Warden overheard and nodded. "Just wait here a moment," he said, "and we'll go. I want to take a look forward." He strode from them down the broad way between the lines of workers.

Harry heard the step behind him on the steel floor. He thought the others were with him. Under the rattle of the cogs his sick imagination caught the swish of a dress — almost he thought he caught a faint breath of a familiar perfume — and he averted his face till they should pass. It was by reason of this that his lowered eyes caught a stealthy movement in the man at the next machine — a move-

ment of one hand which crept under his jacket, and jerked forth, clutching something shining and murderous.

Harry acted without conscious thought, by swift and certain instinct. As the lean arm, tense with hate, went up behind the Warden's back, he leaped forward with a cry of warning, caught the wrist whose hand held the sharpened file, and both went down clinched and struggling together.

The cry, sharp and strained, pierced across the din. It brought the Superintendent to his feet on his platform, like the release of a coiled spring, a revolver in either hand.

"Back to the door!" he roared, and Malcolm's sinewy arm swept the two girls behind him. The fierce clamour of a bell sounded outside. There was sudden pandemonium. Doors opened, men in uniform dashed by her, and on the platform the Superintendent stood, crouching forward like a panther about to spring, still as a statue, both hands outstretched with their gleaming muzzles, his eyes flashing over the room.

In that desperate struggle, as he clung to the maddened convict, Harry was conscious only of the strenuous confusion — of commands that snapped like whip-lashes — of the burly form of the Warden above him and that of a "trusty" who snatched at the vicious weapon — of a sudden anguished pang in his shoulder.

Then, swiftly and sweetly, the whole world slipped away into blankness and silence.

A half hour later, as Echo and Nancy sat with Malcolm in the office, on the ground floor of the frame building just inside the great double gates of the prison, the Warden entered. His grave face lightened with a smile of reassurance.

"All well," he said cheerfully. "It came close to being a nasty wound, but the doctor says no harm will come of it, though he will be in the hospital ward for a week. I wouldn't have had this fracas happen while you ladies were here for a year's salary," he added, "and that's a fact!"

Nancy's face was still pale, and she shivered as he spoke, but she gave a little laugh, as she said, "We didn't bring you luck to-day, did we? You'll be wary of Friday visitors hereafter."

"On the contrary," he asserted, "I'm inclined to think I'm a mighty lucky man. It was cunningly planned, with collusion, too, and if it had succeeded there might have been a very bad hour or two — for everybody."

Malcolm turned to him. "The man saved the situation, Warden, and it was a very close call, indeed. If there was collusion I imagine it'll be dangerous in the ranks for him hereafter."

The Warden nodded. "I've thought of that. The trusty who has been clerking in the Record-

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Room, upstairs, is sick, as it happens. He shall have the place. He sha'n't come to any harm as long as I'm in charge, rest assured of that."

He went with them to the great double-gate. "It's a curious thing," he said thoughtfully, as they said good-bye, "that the man who did that should have been the very one we had been talking about, isn't it?"

The same thought was in all their minds. There had flashed across Echo's, too, a memory of her childhood, a revolting incident of another prison, where a hundred convicts had risen, had killed their keepers and for two days had run desperate riot within the enclosure — till troops had been rushed to the scene. What if that flaming human lava had burst beyond control to-day? She shuddered.

A single hand, maybe, had prevented this — the hand of the man who once before had saved her — who was now shut in this horrible place, perhaps for want of the testimony which she alone could give!

CHAPTER XXXII

THE COMING OF JOHN STARK

HARRY rose from his seat at the desk in the Record-Room and went over to the window. The frost had painted silver ferns and sea weed on its pane, and the prison yard, under the high, saffron-tinted sun, was white with a light powdering of snow which hid its harsh outlines and dingy yellow hue with a mantle of purity and beauty. It was a stinging cold though sunshiny afternoon. Along the wall the sentries, as they paced, swung benumbed arms to start the sluggish blood coursing to warmth. Here and there on the hard ground a pigeon traced its feathery footprints, startling the quarrelsome sparrows, and above in the clear sky a buzzard drew widening circles, an ink-blot on the blue. Across the open space came the muffled roar of the shops and down under the inner gateway the gate-keeper was stamping his Arctic-shod feet and whistling "Weep no more my lad-ee," in syncopated time.

Two weeks Harry had been in the hospital ward, for after those months of confinement the depleted blood had made recuperation slow; but he had steadily mended, and now, though still at times his healing shoulder pained him somewhat, he was practi-

cally as strong as before. He had been acutely grateful for the change to the pleasant Record-Room, with its broad window to the sunshine and the drier upper air, for the fact that he no longer tramped in the lock-step or took his meals in the common mess-room — most of all for release from his unsavoury cell-mate. For since the affair in the shop, he had been given a cell to himself.

His momentary glimpse on that day of Echo had stung his every sense to quivering protest. It had pierced, as with a fiery sword, the torpor which had unwrapped his love with its protecting armour and that love had awaked to agonised consciousness, vivified and intensified. Then, in his loneliness, the knowledge that the woman he would have died for had left him to drag out his penalty, would sweep over him till a fierce hatred of her would rise up in him — to be swept away as swiftly by something sweeter and stronger that would not be denied. So, in the end, mingled with this confusion of feeling, there came to him the knowledge that the bitter conviction that she could never again be anything to him, with the contempt for life which had grown from it, had been nevertheless inexpressibly softened by the living warmth of her presence, sad and fleeting as that had been.

Presently Harry turned back to the desk, and picked up the annotated card, a portion of whose record he had been about to transcribe in permanent form in a leathern tome that lay there. It was the

fling-card on whose reverse side was pasted his own photograph, full-face and profile, and containing his physical measurements — taken upon the precise and delicate instruments that lined the room — which had been filled out on the day of his arrival. It was the sight of this, with the bitter memories it evoked, which had given him pause. There it was, an enduring monument, stamping forever the man to whom it corresponded, a convict, thrust, so long as he should live, from the society of clean and upright men and women, debarred even from the exercise of the functions of citizenship!

As he dipped his pen in the ink, a quick step sounded on the stairway, and the door opened to admit a man wearing a frogged overcoat with huge fur collar and lapels, and a fur cap whose flaps were turned down over his ears. He was about Harry's age though of slightly heavier build, with somewhat similar firm chin and grey eyes, but with cheeks in which the blood darkled redly, and across one was a slanting scar, slight but sufficiently perceptible. He carried a small valise which he set down, blowing on his nattily-gloved fingers.

"Oh! I beg pardon," he said. "The Warden told me I might change my togs up here. I didn't know the room was occupied."

"You'll not disturb me," answered Harry. "As it happens, I am occupied too."

The stranger laughed — a rather eager, boyish laugh which caught Harry with a subtle tang of old

acquaintance. With the pen in his hand, he was staring curiously at that ruddy cheek and its slanting scar, his mind following something elusive and far away. He was feeling the edge of a half-recollection, vague and shadowy and dream-like, of a sawdust bar-room floor lighted with flaring lamps, of ribald conversation, of a deal table across which a face like that had looked at him. But the memory at which he grasped had belonged to that phase of intoxication in which sense-impression had left no enduring record, and he could not capture it.

John Stark was unconscious of the fixed gaze. He had opened the valise upon a chair and now was laying its contents upon another. Harry saw with surprise that these included a striped jacket and trousers, flat peaked cap and heavy hob-nailed shoes such as each inmate of the prison wore. Last he took out a flat tin box which opened out in two sections, and set it on the end of the desk. It was a "make-up" box of the stage dressing-room, and the sight of its tiny compartments, holding rouge, lamp-black, powder and grease-paint, the pencils and hare's foot, brought back to Harry with a rush old days of amateur theatricals and society stagery. These articles laid out, the other began rapidly to undress. He chuckled as, turning, he caught the look of puzzle on Harry's face.

"I'm not really crazy," he said laughingly. "The fact is, I'm trying an experiment — with the Warden's permission. For half an hour I'm going

to take my place with those fellows down there; ” — he nodded towards the window — “ going in to supper with them. I have a bet on with the Deputy Warden that I can do it so that none of the Superintendents will spot me ! ”

He had discarded shirt, collar and shoes, and was now arraying himself in the coarse striped garments and clumsy foot-wear. He looked himself over half-humorously. “ Ugh ! ” he exclaimed. “ I swear, it gives me the creeps. This is the real stuff, you see ! I don’t get the true spirit of the thing when I play it.”

“ When you play it ? ” repeated Harry, inquiringly.

“ Oh,” said the other. “ I ought to explain. I’m starring in ‘ The Jail Bird ’ — the play that’s on here this week. I have the title-rôle. It’s a fad with me to get up my ‘ business ’ first-hand, and this institution is too good a chance to miss. It’s mighty good press-agent stuff for the local papers, incidentally ! ” The lid of the tin box was a mirror, and propping this upright, he now busied himself with the facial make-up, applying a greyish grease-paint which obliterated the scar on the cheek and lent the requisite pallor, and deepening this with darker pencilled shades. In the midst of his labour he asked :

“ Have you seen the piece ? ”

“ No,” said Harry, grimly. “ Our business here interferes somewhat with our evening pleasures.”

Something in the tone made the other look up

quickly. Harry's cap had been pushed back when the visitor had entered. He had on, also, a spotless duck over-jacket which buttoned close up to the throat. Now the cap was pulled low on his forehead, and the jacket was open, revealing the tell-tale stripes beneath. The actor started.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, in embarrassment. "I thought — I didn't know —"

"So I perceived," said Harry calmly. "Pray do not apologise, however. The atmosphere does not tend to develop over-sensitiveness. I must congratulate you on your appearance. The effect is really wonderful."

There was no sarcasm in his words: the illusion was marvellously carried. When the peaked cap was pulled over the other's forehead, a little to one side, Harry thought him highly likely to carry off his wager with the Deputy Warden.

At the moment the bell sounded — the signal to knock off work for the early supper — and John Stark rose hastily. "I'm off now for the lock-step," he said, with his hand on the door. "By the way, if these duds of mine are in the way, chuck 'em in some other room. I can dress anywhere."

The brogans clattered down the stair.

Harry went to the window and watched him cross the yard, a turnkey, wearing a suppressed grin, by his side. Then he returned to the desk, but his pen lay idle by his hand. The curious visit, with its whiff of the outside world, had been packed with

clutching reminders of things that had had pleasant part in his past — reminders of society nights when, for sweet charity's sake, he had played those old mimic rôles. Some one entered, bringing his supper in a tin pail, and went out again, but he did not look up. He was thinking with bitterness that the flip-pant masquerader, sitting now with that striped company in the mess-room, would presently emerge, free to pass out into the glad world. It would be only a lark to laugh over, an essay in effrontery performed for a wager and the delectation of a press-agent!

Harry suddenly felt the longing to be free take him by the throat, so that he trembled in every limb with the force of it. He smelled the wind racing across frosty meadows; he could almost fancy that he heard the flow of river-water under its icy coverlet; he could almost see the gnarled catalpas along the Allen driveway lifting their wintry twisted arms toward him. What would it not mean to him if he, like that cheerful stroller, might but slough off this hateful, unnatural character and step forth, himself again!

He started. A thought mad as a nightmare had flashed through his brain. He felt his blood beat to his temples; then instantly he became icily cool and tense in every nerve.

In another moment he had thrown off his over-jacket, and was seated before the make-up box.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE UNDERSTUDY

WITH the certainty of ancient practice he applied rouge and pencil deftly to his face, rubbing in a deeper tinge on the cheeks, shadowing the temples, accentuating by ever so little the corners of eyes and mouth. Lastly he drew a slanting scar on the right cheek, emphasising it a trifle, as the keynote of the counterfeit.

He looked at himself, swiftly, critically. There was but the one double gate and the single watchman to pass — and the sunlight was not bright under the archway! And luckily the fur cap, with its ear-flaps, effectually hid the cropped scalp. He wasted no time in changing clothes, but turned up the striped trousers and the sleeves of the jacket and donned the smart habilaments over his prison rig, the extra lining compensating for his slighter form. In five minutes he was completely dressed, even to spats and flaunting tie. All the while he was thinking rapidly and coolly, weighing contingencies, estimating chances, taking into lightning account each detail which might mean the slenderest advantage in the desperate game. Lastly he thrust his prison cap under his coat and put the make-up box and the tin dinner-pail into the empty valise.

Overcoated and with the valise in his hand, he strode to the door — to come back to his desk with a quick afterthought, to pick up the record-card that bore his own number, and slip it into an inner pocket. Then he opened the door and went quickly down the stair.

Fate was kind. The Warden was not in his office. As a matter of fact, at that very moment, with outward gravity yet with inner amusement, he was witnessing John Stark's nonchalant experiment and finding the bit of clever impersonation, under the very eyes of his unsuspecting assistants, vastly diverting.

Harry went out to the gate.

The watchman looked up, surprised. "Hello!" he said. "The half-hour isn't up already, is it? Or did you weaken?"

Harry laughed. "Not I!" he answered, airily. "I've had no end of a lark. I'd have stayed longer only I've got a rehearsal on. I could have pulled the wool over their eyes for a week!" As he spoke he drew out a silver cigarette-and-match box which his hand had encountered in the overcoat pocket, and lighted a cigarette behind his cupped hands. In that crucial instant he dared not look at the face so near him and his heart seemed to flutter and then stop beating — till there came the ponderous grind of the great lock as the inner gate swung open.

The watchman was chuckling as he unlocked the outer barrier. "Well, that's one on the Deputy

Warden!" he said appreciatively. "You're a clever one to have pulled it off!"

Harry stepped jauntily through. "Come and see me do it on the stage," he said, nodding a brisk good-bye. "It's up to the Warden to stand tickets all round, I should think!"

The gate clanged shut behind him.

The sound sent to his soul the first agonised stab of futility. He had won through those pitiless encircling walls, yet what chance had he of ultimate escape, after all, there on the highway, in that recognisable costume, with scant grace at best from pursuit? Then, even as the cold wave of hopelessness swept over him, he saw something which sent his blood running like quicksilver; it was the actor's empty motor standing at the side of the road.

In another minute he was in its seat, his grip on the wheel, his hand touching the lever of the self-starter. It was not of a make which he knew, but he had always been an ardent motorist, had known every cog and bearing of his own car's intricate mechanism, and before the machine was well under way he had mastered its essentials.

As the snow-dusted road spun out behind him, he drew deep, gasping breaths of the cold air and felt the dimming sunshine on his face like the touch of some magical elixir, yet he was free from agitation, his mind was working clearly and coolly. The alarm would come soon. When the genial young tragedian returned to the office building, he would

be likely to assume that his suggestion had been acted upon, and his clothing bestowed in another room. Subsequent inquiry might be worth a few minutes. The absence of Harry's cap and the tin pail would suggest that he had gone to his cell to eat his supper, a privilege that was his when he cared to avail himself of it — this would be good for a few minutes more. A general search of the buildings would be next in order. How soon the inquiry would embrace the watchman at the outer gate could not be guessed. Altogether he might count, perhaps, on a half-hour. He could cover few miles in that time, and telephone and the clicking wire would soon be busy. It would be the automobile that would be first traced, and the sentries on the wall would report the direction he had taken. He must rid himself of the car, and somehow double on his trail!

Far to the right, across wastes of snowy fields and numb, glittering trees, a line of telegraph poles thrust up darkly against the skyline. A quick plan flashed to his mind. The road was topping a gentle rise now, where the wind had swept the hard ground clear of the light snow. He stopped, and cast a glance before and behind him; no vehicle was in sight. He sprang out and pulled out the rails of the fence that lined the road, then ran the motor into the field and into a hollow of dead, rustling stalks, where stood a group of hayricks which would effectually hide it from the highway. He left the

fur-overcoat and the valise in the car, replaced the fence-rails and ran across the field to the railroad track. A quarter of a mile further along stood a small country station and he turned his steps thither, making shift as he went to wipe the grease-paint from his face with John Stark's perfumed handkerchief.

The ticket-seller, who combined with his duties those of freight and express agent and general factotum, was sweeping out his tiny box of an office. "What is the next train west?" inquired Harry.

"None till nine to-night," was the reply. "There's one due in twenty minutes, but she only stops for through passengers."

Before entering Harry had gone through John Stark's pockets; now he pushed a bill under the little wicket. "I happen to be going through," he said easily.

The other made out the ticket with deliberation, laboriously counted the change and leisurely went out to the platform to affix the red flag. The minutes that passed thereafter the lone passenger was all his life to remember as a ghastly interval measured by dragging epochs that drew themselves snail-like across some incalculable duration of time. When the express came to its grinding stop cold drops of perspiration were on Harry's face. He swung himself aboard and went forward to the day-coach.

Five minutes later the train stopped at a water-

tank, to refresh the thirsty engine. A half mile away, outlined sombrely against the dusky evening blue, rose a huddle of dingy yellow walls. The occupant of the seat in front of him leaned to look through the window.

"What are those buildings?" he asked interestedly of the conductor, who was passing down the aisle.

"That's the State Penitentiary," was the answer.

As he spoke through the silence there came a deep, dull *boom*, repeated again and again — the sound of a monster bell, tolling.

"What's that?" the other asked. Windows went up along the car. Harry lifted his also, with outward coolness but with a curious spasm of the heart. The conductor stooped to peer beside him.

"It's the alarm," he said. "A prisoner must have escaped."

Amid excited exclamations the train started again, and the conductor withdrew his head. "They'll soon get him," he predicted, as he punched Harry's ticket. "The poor devil won't get far in those striped clothes they make them wear!"

"No," said Harry. "I fancy he won't."

Night had fallen, the dark relieved by the dim lustre of a thin new moon, when Sevier rose and sauntered back to the platform. The train was passing through a defile and laboriously puffing up a grade. He looked back into the lighted car; no one

was observing him. He buttoned his coat close about him and poising on the lowest step to choose his ground, sprang off into a snowbank.

He had made his leap with all the care possible, but the speed of the train was such that only the snow and his padded clothing saved him from serious injury. As it was it was some minutes before he could regain his breath, and then it came with a keen stab that seemed a sword piercing his shoulder — a sharp complaint from the recent wound. He rose painfully, but at the first step collapsed with a groan, realising that he had twisted his ankle badly. With lips compressed from the wretched pang, he rose again and set the injured member to the ground, forcing it to bear his weight. For a while each step was agony, then this dulled somewhat and he went steadily on, limping along the uneven ties.

When he came to the crest of the rise he stopped and looked about him. He knew, roughly, where he was. Across the dark valley unrolling at his feet under a sky that shook with stars, he could dimly make out another darker ridge. Beyond lay a deeper valley and beyond that the foot-hills of the Blue Ridge, and there, forty miles away as the crow flies — how far by the irregular route he must take he could not estimate — lay his mountain lodge, the lonely little demesne of forest and stream, whither he had been wont to go for summer weeks of hunting and fishing, with its rough but spacious bungalow presided over by his care-taker, old "Jubilee Jim,"

whose father had been a slave of his father before the Civil War.

Forty miles as the crow flies! Across a difficult and sparsely-settled country, with now only the faint moonlight and a natural instinct of direction to guide him, in patent-leather shoes and with a sprained ankle!

He set his teeth and plunged down the declivity through the tumbled rocks and snow-drifts.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CRUCIBLE

ECHO stood at the gate of Midfields, her gloved hand delaying to close it, her eyes gazing down the featureless street along which yellow window-squares were beginning to spring out, and vague figures moved, now standing out sharply under the newly lighted arc-lamps at the crossing, now vanishing beyond into the chill windless dusk. Behind her lay the purpling lawn, with its tumult of leaves under the acacias, the oaks with their red-lipped foliage and the tall chrysanthemums at the edge of the frost-touched grass that stretched like the skins of young fawns about the great house with its fluted columns, dim and grey now in the deepening twilight. About her were only the quiet of the cold evening, the bewildered shadows huddling beneath the shrubs, and the faint snap of frosty tree-branches in the tightening of the first bonds of winter, above only the windless silence and a wild white moon flowing through dusky wreaths of cloud.

But she felt no soothing influence in the hush. Her mind was far away, in another city and state; her thought had entered again the gloomy prison which she had visited with Nancy Langham and

Malcolm — on a day when a prisoner had intervened to save the Warden's life. The peace of autumn evenings brought no comfort to that place, save it were the mere rest of wearied bodies. A city of itself, it was as alien to that city so near it, of comfortable homes and pleasant people which she had visited, as the deep life of the coal-miner is alien to that of the free hunter who breathes the sweeter air a thousand feet above the other's sunless toil. Outside of those walls folk were eager and merry; inside lights were dim, life itself sluggish and inept; there were sore hearts, sterile hopes, smouldering hatreds, an oligarchy of despotism ruling with slow cruelties, a community of apathy and despair.

Since her return from the Langhams she had moved, so it seemed to her, in a kind of sombre dream in which her daily duties were mechanical and involuntary and her only real life that inner consciousness which had writhed and struggled unceasingly. A sense of actual, personal guilt bound her, by a bond stronger than steel, to that unknown prisoner in the Penitentiary, weighing upon her spirit as heavy as a promise to the dead.

What should she — what was she bound to do? Which way should she turn? There was Mason's opinion, based upon a long and sensitive intercourse, that the man was no criminal; that, had he been absolved of attempted murder, he could have cleared himself of the baleful association. But that, after all, was only Mason's opinion. He might be wrong.

And if so, though the man had not fired the shot, he was a partner in his comrade's iniquity, a party to the greater guilt. An enemy to society, his penalty was just and right. Was she called upon, on such an empty hypothesis, to take upon herself a horrible mantle of notoriety? So she had reasoned, but the self-accusation had remained, not to be argued back by casuistry, a stern visitant that stood insistently before her, pointing the stern finger of denunciation.

As she stood by the gate in the dusk, she shivered as though the still cold penetrated beneath her furs. She must tell the truth! Whatever the result, she must disclose the part she had played. She had no thought that this might be accomplished without publicity, or that testimony which might be basis for executive action could be secret. In imagination she pictured herself standing before the same tribunal by which an innocent man had been condemned, telling her story to the impartial and impersonal Law — telling it openly, before all the world!

The world? It was not this thought which in this moment of harrowing decision seemed to scratch her soul like an etcher's needle. She was thinking now only of Harry Sevier. He stood out alone, sharply, clearly defined against the meaningless multitude. She could no longer take refuge in her pride; that had vanished long ago in the misery of his absence. She wanted him, and him only, desired him with all the strength of her woman's love, which had been

sharpened and deepened by the experiences through which she had been passing. When he returned, it would be to find her the centre of an open scandal, sprung to new and sensational life — the “mysterious woman” who had been blazoned in a hundred headlines, her name no longer spotless, but cheapened by tawdry mystery and smirched by innuendo! Would it not kill any vestige of love his heart might still hold for her?

And yet beneath her dread and apprehension there had come to her in her struggle the awakening of something as deep and imperative as her love — the insistent “Thou shalt!” — the nascent *must* of truth and honour, fruit of generations of clean ancestry, which brought clearer vision and resolve.

She turned from the gate at length, her step dragging as if from weariness. She had a strange feeling that in that final hour of decision she had grown physically and mentally old.

As she neared the house, there came from the placid street the raucous *honk* of a motor and the sound of masculine voices lifted in a song whose refrain solicitously inquired as to the whereabouts of a certain dog named Rover. The chording was somewhat uncertain, but any lack was more than made up by laughter and noise. She recognised the baritone as that of her brother, Chisholm.

Chilly jumped down at the gate, and as the automobile turned and sped back, its occupants calling

joyful good-byes, he ran after her up the drive. Overtaking her, he leaned to kiss her cheek, as she caught a familiar odour upon his breath. She turned her face aside.

He noted this with a little laugh. "Come, prunes and prisms," he said, "out with it! Yes, I've had a drink — numerous ones, in fact. Now on with the lecture; let joy be unconfined!"

"When did I ever lecture you, Chilly?" Echo answered, dully.

"You *have* been pretty decent, that's a fact, Echo," he responded, with humorous lugubriousness. "I wish father took after you more!"

They had reached the porch now and he stole a quick glance through the window. "I discern the shadow of my doting parent aforesaid," he remarked flippantly, "and having a due regard for the proprieties — and peace — I think I'll slip in the side-door and give the prodigal a wash-up and a clove before he enters the lion's den."

He nodded laughingly and left her to enter the front door alone.

A few minutes later, divested of coat and furs, she came into the drawing-room where her father and mother sat, the former with his magazine and the latter perusing the evening paper. Mrs. Allen withdrew her lorgnette and looked up.

"By the way, Echo," she said. "Here's the closing chapter of the adventure you and Nancy had at the jail." She turned the page and read aloud:

"It became known to-day that a dangerous criminal escaped day before yesterday and got clean away from the Penitentiary of our sister state. The prisoner, who was serving a term of twenty years for burglary, a few months since shot down Mr. Cameron Craig, the well known financier, in his library at midnight. It is to be hoped that there will be a close examination into what appears to be a glaring exhibition of lax methods and unpardonable carelessness on the part of the prison authorities."

Echo could not have had a deeper sensation of amazement and relief. A wave of excitement had passed over her, leaving her cool and self-possessed, and able to take a natural part in the conversation that followed. But in her heart she was saying over and over:

"I am safe — safe! There is no question now of my telling! The secret is mine — mine — mine!"

CHAPTER XXXV

SANCTUARY

IN his little cabin, close by a big log-walled bungalow on a lonely slope of the Blue Ridge, now snugly frozen in by its winter snows, old "Jubilee Jim" lay in a deep sleep. The moonlight, paling before the coming dawn, came through the single window, lighting dimly the seamed black face on the pallet, the sacks of flour and beans in the corner, a side of bacon hung against the wall and strings of dried red-peppers and bunches of herbs suspended from the rafters. On the floor before the fire-place, in which a few red embers still glowed, snored a yellow hound, gaunt and long of limb.

There was no other house within miles of the place, but solitariness was a habit with Jubilee Jim, and he did not miss human companionship. Ten years before, the man who had chosen that wild spot and had built the bungalow for occasional summer outings with his chosen comrades, in which they might shoot and fish and live in primitive, health-giving fashion, has ensconced the old negro there as general cook and care-taker. He had built himself a tight little cabin close at hand and remained there year in and year out to guard the building against the frequent forest fires. In his pottering negro

way he was a Jack of many trades, in the summer cultivating a little cleared patch of "garden truck" back of his cabin and in winter trapping small game, and of evenings poring over his Bible, spelling out the words laboriously — a gift he had learned many years before from some country "missioner." Three or four times a year, leaving the lean hound in possession, he trudged ten miles to the nearest village for what supplies he needed. But on these occasions he felt no temptation to remain with his kind, toiling back contentedly to his little cabin, his hound, and his Bible.

Suddenly, in the tense frozen silence, the great hound stirred and lifted his head with a low guttural growl. His master woke and turned on the creaking couch.

"He-e-sh!" he said impatiently. "Whut fo' yo' want ter mek dat noise en steal mah sleep!"

At the remonstrance the lean tail thumped the board floor, but another louder growl, deep and menacing, came from the shaggy throat. The old negro lifted himself and listened.

"Sumpen out dar!" muttered Jubilee Jim, straining his ears, for now he caught the sound that had pricked the acuter hearing of the animal — a curious, struggling sound like something wallowing in heavy snowdrifts.

"Sumpen *big!*" Jubilee Jim's wrinkled face looked puzzled in the moonlight and his eyes rolled to the wall where, on two wooden pegs, sat an old-

fashioned shot-gun. "Don' reck'n et's er bar!" he whispered to the hound. "Ain't ben no bar croun' hyuh en mawn thuhty yeahs!" He got up and set his ear to the crack of the door. As he bent his stooped frame, something lunged against the wall outside, and at the sound the hound's bristles rose and he sent forth a fierce, rumbling bay that rattled the window.

"Et's er *man!*" said Jubilee Jim. He turned hastily to the rough-hewn table and lighted a lantern; then snapping a chain into the dog's collar and tethering him to the wall, he went to the door and lifted its heavy bar. It opened inward and there half stumbled, half fell across the threshold a snowy figure that collapsed at his feet.

"Mah Lawd!" ejaculated the old man. "What he doin' hyuh?"

With a sharp word to the leaping, raging hound, he dragged the recumbent body inside, shut the door, and lighted a bundle of pine knots in the fire-place. In the bright yellow light that flooded the cabin he knelt down and examined the man who lay there. He drew off the frosty fur cap from the close-clipped head. The coat was stiff with frost so that he had trouble to unbutton and remove it, and the shoes were broken. He took a knife and carefully cut them off from the feet, noticing with quick pity that one ankle was swollen to twice its natural size.

"Reck'n yo' mos' froze ter def!" said Jubilee Jim. "En starved too!" He rummaged on a shelf,

found an iron skillet containing some broth and set it close to the blazing wood. Then, he drew the limp figure upon his couch and began to remove the clothing, now wet and clinging.

As he opened the shirt, however, he started back with an exclamation.

Well he knew what that jacket with its black and yellow-grey stripes meant! Had he not often seen the sullen chain-gang breaking stone on the mountain roads? The man who lay before him was a criminal in desperate flight in stolen garments! He could tie him fast, unconscious and helpless as he was, and leave the dog to guard him, while he went down to the town for officers. But as he thought, something else came to his mind. "Sick en in prison, en ye visited me!" he muttered. "De Good Man he say dat. Dis hyuh man done been in prison, en he moughty sick too. What dee Good Man do, Ah wondah? Reck'n he ain' gwine lock him up, not 'treckly, nohow!"

He saw a crimson stain that spread over the stripes. He touched it — it was blood.

Five minutes later, in the warming cabin, he was examining an opened wound in the shoulder of the insensible man. He washed it carefully and bound it up with some of the medicinal herbs that hung from the rafters. This done, he took the skillet from the fire-place and with a spoon forced a little of the hot liquid, drop by drop, between the clenched teeth. Under these ministrations a semblance of

life began to return to the exhausted frame, and with it the chilled body rushed into a fever. The head began to roll from side to side and the lips to mutter indistinguishably.

The hound had grown quiet now, and released from the chain, came to sniff at the bunk. All at once he flung up his great head with a low howl, then, crouching, licked the nerveless hand that hung down.

Jubilee Jim looked in startled amaze, then seized the lantern and held it close. "Who dis hyuh?" he said.

As if at the challenge, the eyes in the white face opened and for a single instant consciousness flickered there. "Jube —" said a weak voice, "you — old — scoundrel —" Then the eyes closed and the mutterings recommenced.

The lantern rattled on the floor, as the old negro fell upon his knees by the pallet. "Et's him!" he cried. "Dee Lawd he'p! Et's Marse Harry hese'f!" He leaned and looked, with a painful bewilderment, at the striped garments, the smooth, clipped scalp. "Huccome he got dem close on?" he said to himself, half-fearfully. He stood a moment looking from them to the pallet, then hastily rolled the sodden things into a bundle and thrust it out of sight behind one of the sacks on the floor.

Late the next afternoon the smoke from the stone



**All at once the hound flung up his great head with
a low howl, then, crouching, licked the nerveless
hand that hung down**

chimney of the big bungalow rose in a pale spiral into the keen windless air. Inside a leaping fire of chestnut wood burned on the huge hearth and Harry lay on a comfortable, blanket-covered couch in the corner. All day long Jubilee Jim had watched beside him, as he tossed in delirium, now and then touching the hot hand, laying cooling cloths on the fevered wound, or feeding him with a spoon. He had not dared go down the mountain to fetch a doctor, fearing to leave his patient so long alone.

All day, as he watched, his slow brain had been busy with the strangeness of that arrival — most of all with the mystery of the striped clothes. To his simple intelligence, unvexed by the complexities of life in communities, evil and good stood out in sharp and irreconcilable contradistinction, and the garments were a harrowing symbol. But deep in him was that profound, unreasoning belief — the South's touching legacy of ante-bellum days — that trust and confidence that is dog-like and unswerving.

Towards evening, when the sick man became easier and he lay more quietly, though his fever ran high, Jubilee Jim opened the door, and stood looking out onto the lone, frosty hillside. The sun was going down amid a flutter of scarlet scarfs and the marbled pines stood in sombre clusters outlined like sentinels above the panted twilight of the snowy valley. At length he knelt down and with gnarled hands clasped and eyes still on the colourful sky, he said:

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"O Lawd, Ah don' know what mek Marse Harry come hyuh lak dis. But yo' knows what he done fo' ole Jube. Keep him yeahs en yeahs, feed him, en when he so sick he gwine die, tek en git er doctah en cure him up. When ah so old ah ain' no good no mo' he gimme dee lan' up hyuh fo' tuh live on. Don' do nuffin cep'n watch dee house, en when he come sometimes Ah cooks fo' him — das all! Ah don' know whaffuh he have on dem wicked clo's — don' keer nuth'n erbout dat. Kase, Lawd, Marse Harry ain' ben fo' tuh do nuth'n *bad*. Dey tek yo' darlin' son, dee Book says, en put er crown o' tho'ns on he beautiful haid, en he ain' done nuth'n 'tall cep'n good. Ah don' keer what Marse Harry have on; Ah reck'n when he come lak dis, Yo' gwine he'p me he'p him — kase das what he done fo' me!"

As the earnest voice ceased, another spoke behind him. "Jube!"

The old man rose hastily and came to the couch. "Yo' knows me ergen, Marse Harry?"

"Yes, Jube. When — did I get here?"

"Dis mawnin', suh, befo' sun-up."

"Was any one else here?"

"No, Marse. Ain' ben nobody up hyuh sence dee fust snow-fall."

Sevier was silent a moment, his eyes fixed on the black, affectionate face. "Jube — bring me the things I — had on."

The other crossed the room and came back with a suit which he laid on the blanket.

Sevier shook his head feebly. "Not those. The — others."

Jubilee Jim hesitated, then turned and left the room. When he came back the striped garments were in his hands.

"Do you — know what — those are?"

The faithful, old face turned a little away. "Ah reck'n dem am some new-fangelly fishin'-close," he said, after a pause.

A faint flicker of a smile touched the sick man's face. He understood. "Put them — into — the fire."

Sevier watched him, as he obeyed. He was very weak and his blood, poisoned from the opened wound, was throbbing with fever. He was preserving consciousness only by a great effort, but his gaze held Jubilee Jim's steadily.

"Jube, I want — no one to — know when I — came, or that I — am here — at all . . . *No one* . . . Do you — understand?"

"Yas, suh."

"I'm going — to be — sick. But — no matter — how sick I — no one is to — be brought here . . . not a doctor . . . nor — any one." Harry's strength was failing now, and the words trailed into indistinctness.

"Yas, Marse Harry."

"I . . . trust you . . . Jube!"

That was all. He was gone again into the fevered delirium.

All that night, and for many days and nights thereafter, old Jubilee Jim, faithful to his word, struggled with death over the body of Harry Sevier.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JUBILEE JIM'S JOURNEY

HARRY stood in the doorway of the Bungalow, one hand shading his eyes, looking down the twisting trail to where, far below, a dark blotch toiled up the slope. During three days he had been alone, for Jubilee Jim had gone upon a journey to the city where lay the old life from which Harry had fled on the day he had ceased to be himself. The snows were gone and an early spring day of azure and gold lay over the satiny stillness of the folded hills. The fresh, pleasant air was full of the whirr of birds and the smell of new bark and bursting buds, the slender birches were unfurling the virginal green of their young leaves, and here and there on the hillsides blossoms were showing. All nature was fulfilling its annual mission of rebirth, audaciously triumphing over autumn's death and winter's sepulture.

The stalwart figure standing on the threshold was good to see. The fever that had followed that terrible night of physical exhaustion had been worsted at last by Jubilee Jim's homely medicaments and the balm of peace and sleep. There had been days when Harry had been perilously near the Great Adventure, but assiduous nursing and a splendid native

constitution had in the end conquered. The pure air of the balsam forest and the comfort of the solitude had at length had their way with him. The flesh had come back to the wasted frame, the old brightness to the eye, and the flush of perfect health to the skin. Now, with his curling hair and his crisp dark beard, trimmed as of old, he was again the Harry Sevier of a year before — save that back of the eyes was a steady something, a deep conscious strength that had come to him from those bitter prison months when his soul had been tried in a fiery furnace of pain.

Sevier dropped his hand with a long sigh of relief, for at a turn in the path, the dark blotch had resolved itself into the figure of a man, followed by a great dog harnessed to a little cart. "It's Jube!" he said aloud. "He's made the trip safely, and he's got the things!"

This journey had been the outcome of much thought on Harry's part. Lying there in the long weeks of convalescence, his mind had been busy with the problem of the future. What to do? He could not stay forever there on the mountain, a lonely hermit. Somewhere, he must take up life again. When he had beguiled those dark prison moods with thoughts of freedom, his imagination had pictured flight to some distant country where, under a borrowed name, he might find a refuge, barren as that refuge might be of all life's sweetness. Freedom now was his. Should he put the past forever behind

him, make his disappearance good, and without more ado drop out of sight and sound forever? All his instinct rebelled against this drastic solution, this cavalier denial of life and its mental exercise for a career of empty futility.

What remained then? To go back to the life he had left behind him on the day he ceased to be Harry Sevier?

Why not? He was free — free to be himself again. Only one, beside Echo, had known that he and the captured house-breaker were identical — that was Craig. And Craig had been taken from his path. And who else would connect Harry Sevier, the lawyer, the club-man of well-known and reputable past, the favourite of drawing-rooms — who could ever associate him with a tawdry burglar and desperate convict who had escaped from a penitentiary in another State? Once more bearded and eyeglassed, without scar or mark to point resemblance or beckon identification, recognition would be the wildest improbability.

Once, as he bettered, Jubilee Jim had gone to the valley below to return with a bundle of back-copies of the County newspaper, and as Harry pored over these avidly, the old life had cried to him from every line. The movement that had been called into life by the Civic Club, in the hour when he had made the first speech of his life that had been untinctured with any personal ambition or selfish motive, had gained momentum; it had taken on party organisation and

would be a force to be reckoned with in the coming campaign. On that day he had had his first taste of the joy of battle for a principle, and he longed inexpressibly to throw the power, of which he was now more than ever conscious, into the struggle for the new ideal.

Suppose he went back, and Craig recovered the mind that was now in eclipse — recovered and remembered? What then?

His safety lay in the fact that no one possessed the clue to the unthinkable reality. Craig, if he recovered, would possess this, and if he in his right senses denounced him, the accusation, spectacular and incredible as it might seem, would have to be seriously met. And he could not meet it, for it would be true! So long as Craig lived, the harrowing danger would always be there — a veritable Sword of Damocles! Would not his future be forever a dubious adventure, haunted always by a torturing shadow and the dread of discovery and shame? In fancy he saw himself seized — to be suddenly confronted with that shameful thing, to face a cloud of witnesses, be dragged back to a cell, despised and broken, once more a convict — that, or else flight, cringing and furtive, with the hounds of the law in cry!

And yet, did not the chances that Craig would not regain his faculties vastly preponderate? The newspapers Harry had read had not contained the item chronicling Craig's journey to Buda-Pesth, and re-

covery was not an imminent possibility to his mind. A year had gone by, and all the skill that wealth could invoke had no doubt been applied, and vainly. Even if sometime he to some extent recovered, it was more than likely that his memory of that fatal night in his library would be impaired. So Harry told himself.

Over and over he followed the trail of painful reflection, in a vicious circle that centred always in the one thought that sent his mind shrinking in upon itself — Echo. What would that old life be to him, denied its old relations? He and she were nothing to one another any more: she was only a stinging memory. And he would see her, meet her, talk with her, always with that sickening pretence of ignorance between them, in a painful hypocrisy, till she should love and marry — some one else than him! A wave of sick revolt had surged over him at the thought. What to him was freedom, even life itself, if each hour held the thumb-screw and the rack?

Thus his resolve had swung back and forth, pendulum-like, tiring itself with the endless question, and much thinking had brought him no nearer a solution. Meanwhile time had been passing, and pending final decision it was necessary for him in some measure to pick up the old threads. There were responsibilities which he had not yet laid down. There were his apartment, his servants, his office — for though provision of a sort had fortunately been made for a time, his affairs must now be put upon a securer basis

which would permit of his taking whatever course should seem best. So, finally, he had sent Jubilee Jim on the long journey, after thoroughly schooling the old man on the part he was to play. By him he had sent a letter to his man of business, with minute instructions which would enable his affairs to be put in order, another to his bank directing the sale of certain securities for cash to be held at his instant demand, a third to Suzuki, his Japanese valet, instructing him to send clothes, and other needful articles, his private papers and a few books — for solace in this solitude until he should have determined what to do.

“Good, Jube!” said Harry, as the old negro came into the room carrying the big bundle from his little cart. “You got everything, then?”

“Yas, Marse Harry. Ah brung dem all — dee papers, en dee close, en dee money f’um dee bank, en all. Moughty glad ah got dis ’yer ole dawg erlong, wid sech er heap o’ money on me! Reck’n Ah spent er *lot* — had tuh pay er qua’tah bof ways fo’ him tuh ride on dee baggage-cyah: wouldn’t let him in dee smokah nohow. Dey argyfied he too big.”

Harry spread out the clothing on the table — suits of fashionable cut, speaking loudly and insistently of the old life. Those he wore at the moment had once been modish too, but their one-time owner would no longer have recognised them, for they were threadbare and as battered as the home-

made moccasins on Harry's feet. At the first opportunity he purposed anonymously to send John Stark double their value, with certain articles the garments had contained — watch, cigarette-case, cuff-links and what-not — now wrapped in a little package in a safe hiding-place.

Harry turned. "Well, Jube, tell me all about it. When you got off the train, where did you go first?"

"To de bank fust. Man dah was moughtily s'prised tuh git yo' lettah. 'Reck'n Mistah Sevier gwine tuh Africy er sumwhah,' he say."

"Where did you go next?"

"To Marse Dick Brent's office — whah dey meks dee newspaperahs. Foun' him settin' dah wid er pipe in he mouf, lookin' jes' ez nachul ez life, same ez when he up hyuh wid yo'-all dat time. Ah cert'n'y glad tuh see Marse Brent, en he ax pow'ful lot o' questions 'bout yo'. 'Mah lan'!' he say; 'Tuh think he up in dat ole mount'n all dis God's-blessed time, loafin' eroun' en gittin' fat ez er buzzard, when we-alls is wu'kin' ouah souls tuh deff, en polytics gittin' red-hot. Whaffoh he do dat? When he come up dar, Jube?' 'Well,' Ah says, 'Ah ain' got no haid fo' gogerfy, Marse Brent, but Ah reckon et mus' a ben las' fall sometime. En den Marse Harry ben moughty sick in dee fall en wintah.' 'Sick!' he say. 'Yo' ole rascal, yo' ain' got no mo' sense dan er snake have hips! Why yo' don' sen' no word home erbout it?' 'Marse Harry he say not tuh,' I say. 'Clar' he ain' gwine be no trubbil tuh nobody.

So Ah doctahs him en nusses him, en aftah while he git all right ergen. On'y he so fon' o' de ole bungalow he jes' cain' bear tuh leave et.' 'Sho!' he say. 'When Ah thinks o' dis hyuh ole wuk, Ah reck'n Ah don' blame him none.' Den he tek me down tuh yo' place fo' dee clo's en things — walkin' erlong wid me jes' lak Ah been yo'-se'f. 'Moughty lot er folkses sorry yo' Marse Harry ain' erbout no mo', Jube,' he say. 'Speakin' o' dat,' he say, 'dahs one o' dem ar' folkses, Ah reck'n, comin' down dee street dis minute!' Ah looks up en Ah sees er moughty pretty young lady, tall en white lak er big lily. 'Dat Miss Echo Allen,' he say."

Harry turned away abruptly and looked out of the open doorway. His face had paled.

"Marse Brent tek off he hat, en he say, 'Miss Echo, what yo' reck'n dee las' spectacular news is? Harry Sevier been up at ole Blue Mount'n all dis yeah!' Well, suh, seems lak dat lady so s'prised she mos' faint right on dee spot. Den dee colah come back in huh cheeks en she laugh — moughty happified laugh, but somehow, et got er little cry en it too, sumwhah. She look at me, en huh eyes jes' de coloh o' er cat-buhd's aig. 'Dis 'yer Jubilee Jim Sandahs,' Marse Brent say, 'whut cook fo' Sevier's outfit up dah, en he also er numbah one nuss, kase dee young loafah ben sick. Bet yo' ben ovah-feedin' him, Jube.' Miss Echo she walk down dee street wid we-all, clar tuh yo' house. Ax how yo' is now, how yo' *look*, is yo' got thinnah — fifty hundud

things she ax erbout. Ole Jube he sho' reck'n dat lady think er pow'ful sight o' yo', Marse Harry!"

Harry choked back an exclamation of misery. Every word had been like a hot needle thrust into a quivering nerve. Her face, with its ivory clearness, under its wonderful whorl of red-gold hair — her eyes deep as sky-mirroring pools in late sun-light — her laugh, her voice! He suddenly seemed to feel the actual touch of her hand in his, as vastly sweet as the shadow of rose-leaves.

"Marse Harry," said Jubilee Jim, humbly, "dee ole man don' know whuffoh yo' come hyuh dis time, er whuffoh yo' so long 'way f'om home. Ain' mah biz'ness, Ah knows. But dee mount'n ain' no place fo' folks tuh stay, cep'n fo' ole Jube whut lib hyuh allus. En Marse Harry, down dah in dee city, ev'y one jes' waitin' en watchin' fo' yo'. Marse Brent, en . . . en dee pretty lady, en all!"

There was a long silence. At last Harry turned from the doorway.

"Thank you, Jube," he said in a low voice. "Now — tell me about Aunt Judy."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CALL

IN the big living-room, now flooded with the mountain sunshine that streamed in through the open door, Richard Brent leaned to knock the ashes from his pipe against the end of the hewn bench on which he sat. Then he looked up at Sevier standing in front of the empty fire-place.

"Well," he asked, "what do you think of it? How's that for a chance, eh?"

Sevier nodded. One hand was tugging at his dark beard, the other was clasp and unclasp nervously behind him. "The new organisation can't win, of course," he answered quietly. "Politically speaking it's too young, and it lacks leaders. But it can make a strong showing, I should think."

Brent laughed as he explored his capacious tobacco-pouch. "Especially if the platform is built wide enough." He pointed to a newspaper he had brought with him, that lay beside him. "That editorial of mine hits the nail squarely on the head. There is one issue and only one which will draw in all the elements opposed to the party that now rules — that is the liquor issue. That *must* go in!"

A quick gleam crossed Harry's face. None but he knew what liquor had done for him, no eye but his

might see the pitiful trail it had dragged across his burnished life!

Brent laughed again. "It's strange that they don't see it!" he said. "Can't they deduce anything. Look at the growth of similar movements in other states. Do they really believe that any genuine good-government party can sit in the same saddle with John Barleycorn? That's why the thing has always failed in the past — compromise, temporise, fusion. Fiddlesticks! why can't they take the bull by the horns? They would, too, if there was some one who would crystallise the thing in their minds." He shot a keen side-glance at Harry. "When you made that Civic Club speech last year," he said shrewdly, "I picked you for the Peter the Hermit of the new Gospel. And then, confound it! you bury yourself in the wilds up here, while every one thinks you've gone abroad, and I have to pack my rheumatic bones twenty miles on an infernal burro, to dig you out of your shell!"

Harry's eyes had been absently fixed on the spread-out newspaper. Something in the other's words, in his manner, caught him. A colour came to his cheeks. "Dig me out of my shell?" he repeated. "What do you mean by that?"

Brent looked at him intently for a long second. During the past year he, like others, had wondered at his friend's long absence. At first he had put it down to natural need of vacation and the other's failure to communicate with his friends had seemed

significant of no more than the mild eccentricity which had always flavoured his actions. Only later the thought had come to him that Harry's absence might be due to an affair of the heart. This to him had pointed unerringly to Echo Allen, and conviction had leaped to a certainty on the day when he had seen her reception of Jubilee Jim's news of Harry's whereabouts. Had it been a lovers' quarrel? he had wondered. If so, and she had sent him away, she had repented of it, that was manifest. The news of Harry's whereabouts, in his mind, had dovetailed with his knowledge of the political situation and its need of leadership, and the second day thereafter had found him on horseback, following the difficult trail to Harry's mountain eyrie. He had come to grips now with his errand. He sat suddenly upright.

"Sevier," he said, "you've got to do it. You are the only one who can. You've got to speak at that convention on the seventeenth and nail that plank into the platform hard and fast!"

Harry made a quick gesture, then left the fireplace and began to stride up and down the room. During that silent, insistent gaze it had come to him with a strange glow of excitement what Brent intended to say. His heart was beating quickly, and a host of conflicting emotions were rioting in his mind. The allusion to his speech of a year ago had brought a throb of the old ecstasy of power — that power which he knew was his now, and in greater de-

gree. If he only might use it for this good purpose!

Brent, looking at him, uncrossed his long legs with a smile. "I agree," he said, "that we may not be able to win this time, but it will start it off right, and it will be a good fight. I'll bet you what you like that within a week — if that plank is rightly hammered in — the Good-Government Clubs all over the State will be wiring allegiance!"

He got up, his lank, nervous figure braced with interest.

"And what if we do lose this Governorship? It will be the first real nail in John Barleycorn's coffin in this State!"

Sevier had sat down on the blanketed couch. His gaze went past the eager face before him and lingered on the sweet, warm world outside, with all its suggestions of new growth and virile strength. But what he really saw was very far away. Was he a poor coward then, to shrink from a woman's smile, a woman's eyes? He put his face in his hands. Possibilities were beckoning to him, dead things springing up alive, old longings, ambitions, appetences plucking at him.

For a time Brent did not speak. He had turned away and stood in the sunny doorway, looking down the trail. At length he faced about.

"Sevier," he said quickly. "What do you say? Will you do it?"

Harry looked up. The colour had faded from his face, but it was alight with a new energy and

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resolution. The call had found him, and at that moment the harrowing dread — the problem itself, which had shown so imminent — seemed to have grown dim, to have drawn into the far distance.

“Yes,” he answered slowly, “yes, Brent. I will come.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CHALLENGE

LOOKING back upon that day, Sevier was often to wonder whether indeed he had missed Fate's purpose, and blinded by a personal ambition, had set its plan at naught. For that instant's decision was to prove the key to a series of fateful doings which bore him on, irresistibly, into a line of action from which, deliberately, he must have shrunk.

But having set his hand, it was characteristic of him that he did not falter. It had required resolution to put Echo and his relations with her into the background, but he accomplished even this, and he allowed no thought of possible complications to affect his mental serenity. His face was composed and determined as he descended from the train, at dusk of the sixteenth, at the familiar city station, to find — as Brent had arranged — his motor waiting for him, with Bob, his chauffeur, wearing a broad grin of welcome, at its door. So pleasantly habitual it all seemed, so sharply remembered was each sight and sound as the car sped through the glimmering traffic, that almost he could have believed the past

year, full as it had been of pain, a vacuous dream and that no hideous hiatus had lain between the then and now.

He was sensible for the first time of the intense mental strain he had been labouring under since his sluggish prison routine had opened into this dubious freedom — the tension of his struggle, the instinct of impending catastrophe, and the ghastly doubt of himself where Echo was concerned. The lassitude and inaction of the Bungalow had added to this strain. The relief now of movement and action brought surcease, and a feeling of present confidence, if not of definite security. Before he reached his apartment, he was sufficiently himself to give the welcome he received from Aunt Judy and from Suzuki a feeling of usualness. Brent, with two or three others who saw eye to eye with him, so far as the exigencies of the political situation were concerned, spent a part of the later evening with him and the talk furnished the final tonic — if any had been needed — to brace him for the task that awaited. That night, for the first time in many months, he slept the deep, fortifying sleep of utter and dreamless unconsciousness.

With the morning he felt no misgiving or shadow of self-doubt. His mind temporarily was clear and untroubled, all of the vexing problem was pushed, by the singleness of his purpose, into the unknown future. By his express wish, his arrival had not been published, and, except for a few of its leaders

with whom Brent had conferred, the circles of the convention, then in session in the biggest auditorium the city boasted, were no more aware than were the hosts of his friends, of his coming. He spent the morning alone in his room, sitting movelessly hour after hour, marshalling his ideas, assembling his forces, stirred as he had never before been stirred by the quick suggestion of a living issue and an unrivalled opportunity.

He lunched quietly alone with Brent in a private room at the club, and immediately afterward drove with him to the hall. Throughout the morning the platform had been under discussion; the debate was now about finished. It was the psychological moment for his effort.

As Harry stood silent before the sea of faces, in the instant that followed his recognition and introduction, he was conscious of a tense and vital concentration that swept from him the last vestige of self-consciousness. With his first measured words, too, the outline which he had pondered during the morning vanished utterly from his brain. He remembered nothing save the one thing he had come to do, saw with his mind's eye only the monstrous evil against which he stood.

Words came to him in a flood — words magically compelling, that burned and quivered in their intense appeal. For an hour he held the interest of the great assembly as no orator had done, sketching with hard and pitiless directness the ramifications of the

grim traffic that blasted whatsoever it touched, that knew no social bar, before which the magnate's mansion and the labourer's tenement were as one, against which no bolt or chain — save it be one wrought by the law of a Sovereign Commonwealth — might avail.

In his words was no tang of the study, none of the didactic methods of the arm-chair student, no array of statistics. What he expressed had been seared upon his soul, in inextinguishable letters and as he spoke shooting pictures etched themselves as if on some quivering panorama in his brain: he saw the black bottle in the wall-cabinet of his inner office — the hidden sanctuary where he had signed away his talent and linked his years to the demon of remorse: he saw the representative of the great Corporation, whose power flowed from that traffic, holding in his merciless hand the happiness of a woman that had been dearer than his own life: he saw the cringing hatred in the eyes of Paddy the Brick, the furtive drink-lined faces of the jail corridors. And in his passionate denunciation, he called upon those who heard him to do their part to rid the state of its Master and to set it free. Lastly, in a peroration which carried all before it, he pictured a community from which the unendurable stain had been forever wiped away, the pitfalls of its youth filled up, the shame of its prisons lightened — a community ruled no longer by King Alcohol, but by the Genius of the Home, to which freedom no longer stood for

ribald license and self-harm, but for the Common Good.

He stopped amid a dense silence — the truest tribute to real oratory — then with a great burst, the storm of approval came.

It filled the hall with electric feeling, surging in waves that overtopped all decorum and made the hour significant and momentous. Near him Harry saw the party leaders, among them Judge Allen, newly-elected President of the Civic Club; they showed a singular self-assurance overlaid by vivid excitement. In the galleries were banks of feminine faces, tier on tier, merged in a tumultuous hand-clapping like silver rain. Below, the house was on its feet, a sea of waving flags and handkerchiefs.

The tumult swelled, then died away to pulsing band-music and in the subsidence, Brent leaned over Harry's shoulder to give him the quick pressure of a hand — words could not have said so much.

It was not until the convention had adjourned for an hour's recess that Harry could escape from the congratulations that poured upon him where he sat. While he spoke, the sense of mastery and domination had possessed him; now he was feeling the inevitable revulsion, and with it came the fading of his confidence and the relifting of the old sickening question.

It had surged back before the applause had died away, the moment he had released his mind from

the clamping resolution of his purpose, springing upon him like a cunning enemy who had dogged him in the shadow. His roseate speculations of the Bungalow seemed now but hollow wraiths that had mocked him with an unrealisable promise. Could he ever for a moment have cheated himself into forgetfulness of the *impasse* that lay there?

With Brent beside him, he pushed his way to the foyer. There the press was thickened and they were blocked in a corner by the stream of people pouring from the galleries, from which position Harry found himself nodding across to enthusiastic greetings of old acquaintances.

"Good heavens!" fumed Brent, impatiently. "We'll never get out at this rate. Let's try the other door." Harry turned with him, seeking a way through the diminishing crowd. Then, abruptly he stopped. Near at hand, her side-face turned toward him, was Echo. Her delicate colour was heightened by an unwonted flush and her eyes shone softly under the curling golden waves of her hair.

Gazing in a confusion that was almost panic, Harry felt, with a burning sense of helplessness and cowardice, the impossibility of his position. The sight of her was like a cooling stream to a famished wanderer in the desert. It called to him with a thousand voices, lifting before him every sweet reminder of vanished things. She had not yet seen him, and as the crowd swept her slowly closer, he felt to the full his own blindness and egregious self-

assurance that had made this plunge into the old current seem possible. He watched her with a fascinated intensity. She was speaking to some one beside her, her glance wandering. It shifted, then was raised, as if by very attraction, to his face.

He saw recognition spring across it like a shaft of sunlight, as with a quick impulse she started forward — then her arm caught itself, as it were, half extended. He felt himself chill in every nerve, the air was breathless. Mechanically his hand touched hers.

“You have been gone a year,” she said, in a low, uneven voice.

Harry’s very thought seemed suspended. “Is it — so long?” he answered.

He scarcely knew what he said: the reply was a mere involuntary expression of habit, a conventional phrase to fill the moment’s need. He could not know that the very repression with which he was holding himself against the quick thrill of her touch made the words lifeless and inconsequential.

To Echo, however, in the tremulous gladness that had filled her at the knowledge of his return, and the exaltation of the hour, the reply, deserved as at heart she felt it to be, was like a blow in the face. A startled paleness swept up her cheeks like a wave, blotting their hue and misting the clear April of her eyes. She turned half-away, toward her companion, and the next moment the eddying crowd had come between.

On the hurrying pavement Brent dropped his hand on Sevier's shoulder. "I'm not going to congratulate you," he said. "I'm going to congratulate the new party. I'm off to the sanctum to write my editorial while it's red hot. You'll come back for the other session, I suppose. They're liable to nominate to-night."

"No," replied Harry. "I must get away from the crowd somewhere."

Brent caught the lassitude of his tone. "Better walk yourself tired," he counselled, "and then turn in. You'll be all right to-morrow."

They clasped hands and parted.

For a time Sevier walked aimlessly, choosing the less frequented thoroughfares, alone at last to think. He had done his best. Whether or not it would accomplish what Brent had hoped, he had made the strongest effort of which he was capable. The meeting with Echo had shaken him by its very unexpectedness, and had shown him how bitterly hard was to be his struggle with himself. In that instant of their encounter he had realised his own weakness.

Through the long, fading afternoon he walked on and on, past the outskirts of the city, on into the peaceful willow-green quiet of the country, where paved streets gave place to meandering red roads and the air was sweet with the delicate fragrance of blossoming fruit-trees. He sat an hour on the violet-blurred grass above the silver-looping river where he had often fished as a boy. All his life he had

loved that gold-tinted, dream-shadowed valley. But now the soft wild clamour of birds, the multifold perfume of the fields, the errant plum-petals swimming in the breeze, the long-armed trees reaching out over the darkling water, called to him in vain. He scarcely saw the far, blue, hill-brushed horizon unfurl its pageant cloud-clusters to hide the sun, where it hastened, in purple toga, to greet the soft-eyed night.

What Spartan career had he been planning for himself? He loved her, desired her, still. He realised it with a stab of self-contempt. And loving her, could he see her day by day, meet her, talk with her — cold and empty words meaning less than nothing — with his heart crying to hers: “Thus far but no further! Because I loved you once I wear a shameful brand on my forehead, but my arms may never enfold you, your lips never lie on my lips, your heart beat against mine! — Never, never, never!” — could flesh and blood be capable of this? Better to go, while there was yet time, somewhere, anywhere, so it be out of her world. Under the deep evening sky, a gulf of gold, he turned city-ward again, still painfully absorbed with his thoughts — a dark tangle of anguish and doubt and longing.

As he neared his house speeding urchins were crying newspaper extras, and more than once he heard his name in the shouted, dislocated phrases. His speech! The swan’s-song of Harry Sevier!

He let himself into his apartment with his latch-key and wearily switched on the lights. He sud-

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denly remembered that he had eaten nothing since noon and realised that he was wretchedly tired and spent. A pencilled note, with the superscription in Brent's jerky hand, lay on the table. He took it up and opened it.

Then suddenly he gave an inarticulate cry of amaze — of actual fright. He was staring at this message, written an hour before:

*Anti-liquor plank adopted. You were
nominated for Governor on the first
ballot at eight o'clock.*

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE JAILBIRD

TO every man come portentous moments of decision so packed with fate that all that his after life may hold of pain or joy, seen with the clearer view of later knowledge, may well have hung upon the issue. Harry's one greatest moment of crisis had been when he stood in the doorway of Cameron Craig's house, with that midnight alarm pulsing about him — when he had chosen the course that meant safety for Echo at such bitter cost to himself. The moment when he confronted the blunt fact of his nomination was wellnigh as significant.

Such a possibility had never occurred to him. He saw himself now, first with bewilderment, then with passionate resentment, in a predicament as unprecedented as it was unescapable. He had not even had the option of declining the nomination. By now his name, as the new party's choice, was darting over the clicking wires to the remotest borders of the country. How could he accept it? He, who might at any hour, for all he knew, be faced with a charge from which (if, indeed, flight still lay open) he must flee ignominiously, like a thief in the night — which, in the eyes of the law, he was! Yet how

evade the thing thus thrust upon him? After his speech, in which he had championed the new cause so ardently, could he throw ridicule upon the organisation, make its leaders — men whom he had known and respected all his life — laughing-stocks, throw doubt upon his own intentions, and make his action of to-day show forth before all as a flamboyant bid for popular applause, the gallery-appeal of a pitiful *fâneur* and attitudinarian, who had no mind to link himself with an inevitable defeat at the polls?

As Harry stood in the pleasant, lighted room, with Brent's pencilled note in his hand, a strange thought obtruded itself to grow slowly over his confused imaginings. Behind it all was there not the same wise Intention whose outlines he had thought he distinguished in his bitter prison experience? And was he, in faithless presumption, to deny that over-rule, and vanish cavalierly into some sluggish back-current of life? The same fate that had turned Paddy the Brick's pellet of lead the single hair's-breadth that had saved him, perhaps, from the scaffold, had rendered his enemy, at least for the present, incapable of harming him. And this part of his problem belonged to the present. Why had the cards so fallen, unless in that intricate Plan, it was meant that he should now give his hand to this work? He had trusted fate far — might he not trust it further? Though the party that had called him to carry its standard into the fight was destined to failure, it was working for the future, and some other cam-

paign — long after the worst that could befall had come to him — would bring its principles success. He would have done his part!

So, for good or ill to himself, Harry made his momentous decision, and as if it had been a signal, at the same instant there came the quick, insistent ringing of the telephone on his desk.

The next few days were days of ungrudging labour on Harry's part of conferences with the state leaders — for Brent's prophecy had been fulfilled and Good-Government Clubs throughout the state had placed their local machinery in the new party's control. These earlier meetings were, for the most part, in Harry's own apartment, or in the library of Midfields, since Judge Allen was chairman of the Committee on Organisation. On none of these latter occasions had he seen Echo, nor, to his relief, had he met her elsewhere. He gave himself no relaxation, bending all the energies of his reawakened being to the task of detail, and the mapping out of the campaign which he was entering. Whatever his apprehension and trepidation, he had learned his real weight in the hour of his great speech and the sense of power, linked with extraordinary and tangible opportunity, thrilled and dominated him.

There came an evening, however, after a day of more than usual concentration, when he felt that he must relax. He had dined at the hotel with some

of the party's out-of-town lieutenants, but excused himself early and chose to dismiss his motor and to walk home afoot, craving the lightness and gaiety of the jostling streets and gleaming windows.

Presently he found himself passing a theatre-front and remembered that Brent had pressed him to make one of a box-party there that same evening. At the time he had left the matter open, pleading the dinner engagement, but now it occurred to him suddenly that an hour of lights and music would be welcome. It was the intermission after the first act and men were flocking into the doors, chatting and laughing. The spirit of frivolity attracted him and he entered with the rest.

The orchestra was playing — a Bohemian medley of uneven harmonies and wildly plaintive alternations, strung, as on a thread, on the airily-fantastic *motif* of Dvorak's *Humoresque*, and the pirouetting music seemed to belong to the flippant and shallow yet alluring interior, with its plenteous gold-leaf and dark blue draperies embroidered in peacock-feathers — the breath of a life of laughter, of careless amusement, of joy in the present. Harry felt his spirits lift and lighten at the grateful slackening of tension which the *mise en scene* created, and he bowed and smiled easily when the audience testified its recognition, as he followed the attendant along the side wall, by a hushed hand-clapping which ran across the rows of seats.

With his hand parting the rear curtains of the

box, however, he halted irresolutely — its occupants were Mrs. Spottiswoode, Brent, Lawrence Treadwell and Echo. For an instant resentment stirred in him; he guessed that Brent, albeit with the best intentions in the world, had planned this meeting. Then he squared his shoulders and entered. In another moment he had greeted Mrs. Spottiswoode and was bowing over Echo's hand.

The men had risen. "Here is the Candidate!" exclaimed Brent, laughing. "Mrs. Spottiswoode was just about to make me a wager that you wouldn't descend to such triviality."

Pretty Mrs. Spottiswoode smiled as she closed her fan. "If I had, I shouldn't begrudge the loss," she said. "You've missed the first act, Mr. Sevier, but then openings are always dull, aren't they?" Treadwell shook hands with him with frank friendliness. Politically he belonged to the party in power, but his liking for Harry was sincere and of long-standing.

The lights in the house were fading and the orchestra had swung into a soft and measured air. The rustle and chatter among the seats stilled: the curtain was rising. After the few words of greeting, Harry dropped into the vacant chair behind Echo's, in the rear of the enclosure. He had a feeling that again a satiric chance had snatched the reins of conduct from his hands. His unseeing gaze was set upon the crowded tiers beneath, but he was conscious of nothing but that small, delicately-shaped head

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like one in a Greek frieze, that clear-cut profile softly tinged by the dim rose-lamps of the box, the clasped, unringed hands, the lacy sweep of the pale evening-dress silhouetted against the curtain. Beyond the range of his vision manikins came and went upon the stage, speaking meaningless words. At the other side of the box Mrs. Spottiswoode was whispering some humorous adventure to Treadwell and Brent, whose heads were bent toward her. Everything else seemed unreal and far-away, and he and Echo the only realities in a chapter of banality.

He became conscious all at once that her head was turned toward him, and as though by magnetic compulsion his own eyes looked into hers.

"I want to say something to you." The words were the merest whisper on her parted lips, yet he heard. He drew his chair nearer till his bent head was at her shoulder. "Yes," he said.

Her lips trembled, but she spoke in a clear undertone, audible only to him, which faltered the merest trifle:

"I don't know whether — now — it makes any difference to you," she said. "But I — I was not myself when I — wrote you that note, the day you — went away. There was a reason why I — acted as I did. You —"

The low voice failed. There had been in the hesitant words failing pride and shame, mingled with the love that had been so long denied — a revelation which welled from the pure, outspoken honesty of

heart that compelled it, demanding, at all odds, so far as he was concerned, openness and understanding.

The shaken voice, the tremulous lips, the moon-soft fire of her eyes and the faint scent of her clothing, all the sweet suggestions of her presence were crying aloud to Harry, tempting him with a vision of promise. What if she had failed him — then? What if that courage he had dreamed, put to the touch, had shown but cowardice, that love of him a secondary thing to her? She was what he wanted — to yield himself to her arms as a swimmer to the sea! As much as she loved any one — save herself — she loved him! Was not a half loaf better than no bread? The icy barrier of reserve which he had reared crumbled down, and he felt the thing he had tried to imprison leap up, savage and not to be denied. His groping hand went out and touched her arm.

“Echo!” he whispered hoarsely. “Echo —”

His voice died in his throat. Her hands in her lap held the theatrical programme, and words in heavy black-letter — the title of the piece — were staring up at him from the white paper —

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In the shadow, he felt his limbs suddenly trembling. With a kind of fascination his gaze, for the first time since his entrance, lifted to the stage.

It was set as a long flagged corridor of vertical steel bars, into which doors were let at regular inter-

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vals, and behind each door showed a bare, forbidding room, furnished with two iron cots, one above the other, and two wooden stools. As he gazed in consternation, a bell clangored and along the corridor came tramping a line of men clad in dingy stripes, pallid face close to shabby shoulder, one knee rising and falling to the damnable rhythm of the prison lock-step.

Harry felt an algid chill creep over him. He sat upright, his whole body rigid, each detail of the significant picture stamping itself upon his quivering perception. Midway of the line a turnkey unlocked a door in the barred wall and two links of the human chain detached themselves and entered — one stooped and crafty and cringing; the other clean-cut and erect with no stamp of vice upon his face. The clanging bolt shot home, the line moved off. Then, in the silence of the house the comely figure leaned against the bars, and John Stark's voice — or was it *his*, Harry Sevier's? — cried in broken agony:

“And I am innocent — innocent!”

As the curtain descended on the act, amid a crash of orchestral music, Mrs. Spottiswoode turned to Harry with a little shrug.

“It is moving, really, isn't it? But how *terribly* unnatural! Of course in real life nothing like that could happen to an innocent man. What do you think, Mr. Treadwell?”

But Treadwell did not answer at once. He had

turned in surprise to the rear of the box, where a youth in a grey silver-buttoned uniform had parted the curtains. The messenger was looking at Brent, who rose and went to him.

"I beg pardon, sir," the boy said in a low voice, "but they told me at the box-office you were here. Will you please come over to the club? Something is the matter. Perhaps Mr. Sevier will come too."

Brent looked at him — there was agitation in the youthful face. He turned.

"Will you ladies excuse Sevier and me for a few minutes?" he said. "I dare say we shall be back before the curtain goes up again."

At the words Harry had risen also, with a quick relief at this summons, whatever it was, that offered the instant escape. Though his bow took in Echo, he did not look at her, as turning, he followed Brent quickly from the box.

CHAPTER XL

GENTLEMEN ALL

CHISHOLM ALLEN had come to the end of a long tether. He was drunk. Not with the amiable jollity of the youthful tippler, nor with the heavy, fatuous oblivion of the sot, but with the drunkenness that marks the vicious rebellion of the nerve-cell against the prolonged excitation of an intoxicant—the dreadful revenge wherein the outraged brain summons the distorted imagination to fill the victim's landscape with uncouth and demoniacal visitants.

For a long fortnight, at the Springs, with a couple of cronies, he had defied convention and strained the tolerance, which had countenanced past escapades because he was an Allen, to the breaking-point. Only when revelry had sunken to deep debauch had friends been able to bring him to the city, where he had been bestowed in a room at the club to await returning soberness. That night, however, when the friendly guard had relaxed, Chilly had awakened to horrid visions. At first he had known them for creations of his drunken fantasy, but they had multiplied in numbers and horror till they had broken down the frail bulwark of remaining reason and obsessed him with the sense of reality—uncanny

nightmares from some formless abysm, shuddering mistakes of nature, mingling in a monstrous extravaganza that crowded about to menace him.

With a scream Chilly burst from the room and ran along an upper corridor to the brightly-lighted reading-room. It was deserted at that hour — but not for him, for the visitants from which he fled pursued him there! They ringed him about, clutching at him. Livid and shaking, he seized a heavy iron poker from the hearth and crouching in a corner, beat off the imaginary assailants.

It was upon this spectacle that the agitated steward had come, called by a frightened bell-boy, and as the theatre stood opposite, he had hastily sent thither, as the likeliest spot in which to find some *habitué* of the Club who might assume charge of the situation.

Two other club-members stood nonplussed and disconcerted on the threshold of the room when Harry Sevier and Brent entered, with the steward behind them. In the livid face of the boy at bay, the staring distempered eyes, the gripped, impromptu weapon, Harry read the fact. He spoke to him soothingly, but the frenzied brain did not recognise him. To Chilly's imagination the friendly, familiar faces took on the baleful character of the gibbering things by which he was beset. He sprang up, slashing frantically with the iron, panting indistinguishable words. Thus for a moment the writhing images fell back — only one of the iron lizards that

formed the andirons suddenly came to life and on bat's-wings soared to a great marble bust that sat on a shelf above the fireplace, where it perched and spat down at him.

Chilly leaped up at it, dealing it blow after blow with the poker — then laughed wildly to see it suddenly waver and topple forward. So it seemed to him, but an exclamation of dismayed warning broke from Harry's lips; it was the heavy marble itself, its too frail support shattered by the attack, which was falling. He sprang forward.

But he reached the spot too late. The great bust came crashing from its height full upon Chilly's breast, and with a choked cry he went down beneath it.

The others rushed to him and between them the massive stone was lifted from the broken body. "Call up a doctor," Harry ordered the steward. "Get the nearest — tell him to hurry; Mr. Allen is badly hurt." To the rest he said, "Nothing must be known, as to how this happened, outside this room. It was an accident, remember, nothing more. The shelf was weak and the bust fell."

When the doctor came in, the crushed form lay upon a couch hastily improvised from chair-cushions. Blood was welling from the pale lips. He made a hasty examination, then looked up and shook his head.

"Better fetch his father and mother," he said, "and as quickly as possible."

"I will go," volunteered Brent. "My car is at the theatre. I can do it in twenty minutes." He went out quickly, while the man of medicine opened his case and busied himself with restoratives.

To Harry, who stood watching with the others, it seemed that these were to be of no avail, but after a sensible interval Chilly opened his eyes. He gazed at the professional face so near — at the other shocked countenances grouped about. He saw the bust lying on its side.

"I'm — sober now," he gasped. "I was — seeing things, eh? But I seem to be — hurt. What's the matter?"

"The marble fell and struck you," said Harry.

A spasm of pain caught Chilly and he groaned. "I remember," he said, and then, after a pause, "Am I — badly off?"

"I'm afraid so," said the doctor.

The pity in the tone conveyed its message. A tremor ran over Chilly's face. There was a long moment's silence.

"Have I — much time?"

"Not very much," answered the other gently.

Chilly caught a breath that was half a sob.

"Poor little Nancy!" he whispered.

He looked up at the men who stood about him. "I would like —" he said, hesitatingly but clearly, "I would be glad if some — explanation might be made of this — occurrence — which would not involve unnecessary pain to the Duchess. Perhaps

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that is — impossible. But I would — be grateful —”

One of the younger men leaned beside him. It was Lee Carter, his closest friend, who had brought him that afternoon from the Springs. “Dear old chap!” he said, brokenly. “I was standing just under it. You saw it topple and jumped to save me! That is how it happened! Every one of us saw it.”

A wan smile touched the whitening lips, “Gentlemen all!” said Chilly, and closed his eyes.

He lay silent then — he was breathing with increasing difficulty. At length there was the sound of a motor halting outside, and Harry and the rest went out.

In the quiet of the room the door opened upon Judge and Mrs. Allen. She was deadly pale, her face frozen with anguish. She knelt beside the prostrate figure and took the cold hand of her son in hers.

“Chilly!” she cried. “My poor, poor boy!”

His eyes opened. He seemed, in that last fading instant, to see only her. “Duchess!” he whispered, and with the word the light died in his face. “Duchess!”

Mrs. Allen looked at the Judge’s quivering countenance with dull blank eyes, that saw two great tears suddenly detach themselves and roll down his pale cheeks. He took a step toward her.

“Charlotte —” he stammered. “Charlotte!”

There was in the shaking voice something that pierced her agony, a tone that she had not heard on his lips for many, many long years — an echo of accents that she had known when she was a bride. She gazed at him an instant voicelessly.

Then all at once her face broke up and a wild cry tore itself upward from her heart. It was not the voice now of cold and placid scorn, but that of the real woman — the eternal voice of Rachel weeping for her children. The sword of overwhelming tragedy had stripped off the protecting cicatrice of pride and arrogant resentment and bared the lonely soul beneath, that in this shuddering instant groped wildly for human comfort.

The Judge bent down and clasped her, and there, above the body of Chilly, for the first time since the son who lay dead before them had been born, she lay in her husband's arms, her face turned against his breast.

CHAPTER XLI

DARK DAYS

IF I only knew!" That was Echo's mental cry in the long days that followed Chilly's burial. "If I only knew whether Harry cared for me any longer!" Sharp as was her grief for her brother, this pang was the sharper, and it did not dull with time.

After the meeting in the corridor of the Convention Hall, when the barrier had risen, so icily cold, between them, she had been unable to blame him. The very depth of his hurt and resentment only showed her how much he had once cared, and she had longed fiercely for an opportunity of speech with him, which, it seemed to her, must set all right. This opportunity she had discerned in Brent's invitation to the theatre, since he had let fall that he had asked Harry also. She had known the character of the play to be presented and otherwise would have shrunk from the painful memories it must evoke, even though her personal dread had been exercised by the escape from prison of the convict from whose plight had come her own pain of conscience. But the possibility of Harry's presence had outweighed other considerations. In that moment in the box, when

his lips had spoken her name, when she had felt his hand tremble against her arm, the ice had seemed about to melt in understanding. For an instant her heart had leaped up with glad certainty, only to drop to anguished slowness again at his sudden stricken silence.

“If I only knew!” Through the months of the early summer the question sat incarnate by Echo’s side. By night and by day it never left her. She had no confidant, could have none. From this trouble her father himself was barred. It was some relief that she had no longer to wear a smiling motley, but could give her grief free rein, and there were times when she wept till the very fount of her tears seemed to be exhausted — when it seemed to her that all her life was darkened and her love lay stark with its death-tapers licking the gloom.

As time wore on, and her father threw himself again into the work of the political campaign, she was mentally more alone than ever. There were few of those old hours when she had been used to sit with him in the dusky library; for this room had become, gradually, the habitual meeting-place of the leaders, the clearing-house of county news, the forum in which were discussed and decided the varying policies of the struggle. Occasionally Harry took part in these gatherings — not often, for he was now away during long periods, speaking in various parts of the state. By the newspapers Echo followed his every step. He made no speech that she did not

read with eagerness and pride. She knew that he was making a whirlwind campaign that had steadily increased in vigour and effect as the day of election drew nearer, and that, however the issues might fall, he was stamping his individuality deeply upon a wide community. She thrilled with the thought of his success, and in the unselfishness of her love, this was some recompense.

She found a kind of comfort, too, in the realisation that the relations of her father and mother had subtly altered. In her whole life she had never witnessed the smallest discourtesy of word or deed between them, yet there was now a positive element in their intercourse which she had never distinguished. Often now they sat together as the Judge wrote or scanned his reports, sometimes he discussed with his wife the phases of the political situation and once — with what Echo realised afterward was almost a guilty start — she had come upon them sitting in the lamplight hand in hand. She had turned away to discover that her eyes had unaccountably filled with tears.

Most of all that sustained her spirits in this period were her talks with Brent. Trained newspaperman and observer as he was, he had thrown himself into the battle with all ardour. Day after day, in trenchant editorials, he preached the Gospel of the new party, and many times he swung his long legs down the Avenue for a cup of tea at Midfields. His admiration for the fight Harry was making was im-

mense and he found in Echo a perfect listener, sympathetic and comprehending.

And so the months passed till there remained but a fortnight before election day, and so deeply had Echo's imagination entered into the great issue, so intimately were all her thoughts engaged with Harry's tangible success, that even the dread of Craig's recovery, even the pain and puzzle of her heart, were thrust into the background.

That evening she sat at the piano in the drawing-room, her fingers wandering in long dreamy *arpeggios*, when her maid brought her a letter. It was from Nancy Eveland. She opened and read it through, to the postscript on the last page:

"The evening papers have a telegram from Budapesth about Mr. Craig. He left the hospital there yesterday. The operation was completely successful."

She sat for some minutes with the paper held tight in her hand, with a weird feeling that it was a warning, and when she tried again to play her fingers stumbled into discord.

It was long before she slept that night, and then the fear swooped upon her in her dreaming. She thought it was her wedding-day and that she was pacing up a church aisle, over rose-leaves red as blood strewn with seed-pearls that had been her tears. Turned toward her were the faces of her father and mother, of Chilly and of a myriad friends,

who filled every pew. At the altar Harry was standing waiting for her. But every countenance wore a look of astonishment and trepidation, and she knew that it was because the gown she was wearing was not white but black, and her bride's veil of black crêpe. This, however, had been necessary because she had wished that Craig would die, and the wish had somehow brought his death about. She thought she tried to explain this, in a whisper, to Harry, but he shrank from her. She turned to the rector, who had been ready, but as she looked at him, he took off his surplice and dashed it on the floor, and she saw that he was really Craig himself. Then the organ crashed and lights flared up about her and Harry vanished and all that was left was Craig's face, sneering at her, with a red blotch on his temple.

She awoke in the darkness with a start, trembling in every limb — to hear a lone hound howling from the stable.

CHAPTER XLII

THE MENDED ROAD

DR. IVANY, the great Hungarian specialist, adept in the delicate adventurings of brain surgery, ceased his examination and refastened the light bandage upon his patient's head with a look of satisfaction.

"But yes," he said, in his concise French, "it goes well. I release you from my care, Monsieur. One thing, however, you must remember. No excitation. No anger. No prolonged mental labour for some months to come. Otherwise — the tiniest hemorrhage in the affected area — and all my surgery could not undo the damage again."

The spruce young secretary who stood at Craig's side translated.

"All right," said Craig. "Tell him I'm much obliged." He shook hands with the great man without emotion, and when the door had closed upon the latter he got upon his feet. "Have you arranged the rooms at the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get me out of here. The sooner the better."

A half hour later he was in a suite of the hotel. "Now bring me the home papers," he commanded.

"To-day, sir?" ventured the secretary. "Do you think you are strong enough so soon —"

"Do as I tell you," was the curt reply. "I was shot on the ninth of May, last year. I want to begin with the tenth, and I want *all* of them!"

The secretary went into the adjoining room, to return presently with a file of newspapers, stitched neatly together, their columns marked here and there in blue-pencil. He laid the great tome down on the table.

"That's all now," said Craig. "I'll call when I want you again. I'll dine here."

Alone, he drew a long breath. Then he set his teeth and a peculiar expression came to his face. A year, and more, had been snatched from his life — this had been told him when it had been evident that the operation had restored his faculties unimpaired, and as soon as he had recovered sufficient strength. Beyond this, however, he had been told nothing: on this score the surgical authority had been adamant. So, for weeks, denied even the presence of his secretary, he had been constrained, albeit impatiently, to subsist on the merest assurances cabled him from day to day that the interests which had been in his charge were adequately cared for, and to compel his stubborn resolution to patience. Now the embargo had been lifted; he was once more his own master. And before him, in black and white, lay the record of that vanished time, which to him

was but a meaningless void thronged with vague and inchoate images, the story of the ignominy and downfall of the man who had tricked him and robbed him of the woman he desired! The blood rose in his temples. His lips drew up from his clenched teeth and his fingers twitched as he reached for the newspapers.

There it was, the episode that excluded all else from his thought, the sensational headlines running half across the front page — the story, pieced together by the assiduous reportorial pencil, of the burglars and the shooting, the unknown feminine visitor who had disappeared in the confusion leaving no clue behind her, the arrest of the single desperado, closing with the latter's confrontation with Craig himself. An exclamation of satisfaction fell from his lips. He had said to Echo that there lived no man who could say that he had lied — a boast that had had a shameful aftermath. Yet he felt now no shade of remorse for the black perjury that had fastened the attempted murder upon Harry Sevier. Rather he felt disappointed that consciousness had failed him a moment too soon, so that his own lips had not placarded the other to his face. That joy had been denied him.

He turned the leaves, searching avidly for the headlines which should have flung broadcast the startling identification. The events of the great world, the larger happenings that had plunged two

Balkan States into war and overturned a British Ministry, the loss of a great ocean liner — even a senatorial inquiry into the methods of the Distillery Trust — held no interest for him at this moment. His brain had linked onto the past where it had dropped it, and the empty gulf had laid no cooling fingers on his burning craving for revenge.

But the thing he sought was not there. "*Prisoner Refuses to Make Any Statement*"—"Criminal Unknown to Police"—"*Sticks Stubbornly to Policy of Silence*"—as he read, a dull flush overspread his face. Fools! Was it possible that he—Harry Sevier—known to a thousand folk of a city a couple of hundreds of miles away, could hoodwink the police by the silly subterfuge of a newly-shaven chin? The papers shook in his vengeful clutch as he turned and turned, conning the progress of the trial. It ended with the conviction and the sentence; thereafter the headlines told of things of fresher public interest.

For a long time Craig sat perfectly still, staring into the grate whose fire-light danced in yellow shadows on the wall, with the page open on his knees. He had won the first trick, and Harry Sevier had played his lone trump of silence. But what of that? He was a jail-bird, chained to a cell for twenty years. His absence from home would long ago have raised a question, which in the end must become insistent. He, Cameron Craig, could answer that question! His lips curved in a cruel

smile. And Echo? She had profited by the situation — Harry had borne the brunt.

Her lover! A sinistrous rage caught him as he repeated the word to himself. No softer thought of her now lurked in the bitter chambers of his mind. She had mocked and fooled him and he hated her with the still, cold hatred which the strong and evil man feels for the weaker thing that defies him. Yet so far as she was concerned he was helpless. He could not deny his declaration that he had not known the woman in the library. Life was long and he knew the penalty that in the south awaited the man who wantonly attacked the character of a woman. All facts aside, his sober judgment told him that the act would bar against him every social door that now stood open.

But Harry Sevier was another thing. Harry Sevier, thief and house-breaker? Harry Sevier, a midnight assassin? Harry Sevier, the nameless convict in the State's Penitentiary? What a story! Fate held its compensations, after all. Now he would be able to figure, first hand, in the sensation that he should send sweeping over the south like a lurid flame!

He rose and set the newspapers on the table, parting the leaves further along, now that his main craving had been satisfied catching glimpses of other things: movements in the business world, and the new political alignment, the danger of which, to the interests with which he was identified, he had long

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ago discerned. So the Civic Club following had become a full-fledged party now — was reaching out toward a state-wide organisation!

Suddenly his gaze fixed itself and he bent over the page staring unbelievably. A hoarse ejaculation broke from him. What he saw was the line, in inch-high letters —

HENRY SEVIER FOR GOVERNOR!

He snatched up the file again and held it to the light. There was no mistake! Three months ago, while he had lain inert in the hospital above the river, the man he imagined the occupant of a prison-cell had been nominated for the highest office in the Commonwealth, the standard-bearer of the New Ideal!

For an instant a keen trepidation darted through him. His hand went up and touched the bandage. Could it be that he was — not himself? Was what he had imagined only the figment of a brain astray? With a fierce effort at self-control he sat down and beginning at the date at which he had left off his reading, began to scan the columns carefully and methodically, missing nothing.

For two hours he did this, and at length he came upon a paragraph at which his lowering face lightened with exultation. It chronicled in a dozen words the escape from the Penitentiary of the convict who was under imprisonment for the burglary of the Craig mansion and the shooting of its owner.

The circle of evidence closed up. He was certain now.

Craig laughed out loud, a grating laugh of sardonic amusement. Again the cards had fallen Harry Sevier's way. By some lucky chance he had freed himself, and with the effrontery of supposed security had resumed his old place and character, no one the wiser. Now he was actually running for Governor! Well, the higher the pinnacle the more spectacular the fall! The game was his, Craig's, for he held the highest trump!

He rang for his secretary.

"Bring me the steamer-lists," he said, "and have the servants pack my things. We are going to leave on the Nord-Express at midnight."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE PITFALL

“**S**O you think it incredible, then!”
Lawrence Treadwell’s glance at Craig was veiled as he replied, dryly:

“I am considering the evidence as you present it, that’s all. This, it seems to me, is what it amounts to: Mr. Henry Sevier, a reputable citizen and a well known resident of this place, a year ago leaves for a vacation.”

“In disguise,” interrupted Craig.

Treadwell shook his head. “There is no evidence of that — it is mere allegation. He was seen here late one afternoon, as usual. There could be no mistake, for he’s a characteristic enough individual. He had arranged for the closing of his office, had told his clerk, in fact, that he was going abroad. The same night, at midnight in your own house — two hundred miles away and in another state — a man is arrested, one of a gang of burglars. There were all the usual earmarks — open safe, black mask, an attempt at escape, with the shooting of yourself thrown in.”

“I identified him an hour later, as soon as I regained consciousness.”

"As the man who had shot you — yes. Your identification went no further at that time. And since then you have been able to give no evidence."

"Until now," said Craig grimly.

"The burglar," pursued Treadwell, "is tried. He is unknown to the local police. He refuses to tell his name. Naturally! He has served time before and has no hankering for a life-sentence under the 'habitual-criminal' act. He is sentenced to twenty years. After a period of incarceration, he escapes, as jail-birds will, and is not apprehended. Some months afterward, Mr. Henry Sevier returns from his vacation and resumes his popular career. He is just now in the public eye — very much so, indeed. Do you seriously believe a claim that the two men are identical will hold water?"

Craig had been staring at him from under his shaggy brows. Anger was seething in his brain at the suspicion he felt was lurking behind the other's matter-of-fact logic. "Then you believe I am the victim of hallucination?" he asked, with forced calmness.

"Frankly," said Treadwell, "I think for you to allege such a thing openly would, at the very least, make you seem ridiculous. Man, don't you see? You've had a shock — a brain injury. You've been through a long period of mental illness, culminating in a major operation! Don't you realise —"

Craig struck his fist upon the table and his teeth snapped together. "Look here, Treadwell," he

flamed, "I'm as sane as you are, and you know it!"

"Of course, of course," agreed the other, in a mollifying tone. "But why not let the matter rest awhile? Go down for a month to Old Point and build up —"

Craig's face turned livid. He got up, and lifted one clenched fist in the air.

"Think what you like!" he said, venomously. "Do you suppose I care what any one thinks? I'll show you whether I'm right or not!" His voice rose. "I'll drag him in the mud! Every man and woman in these two states — yes, and in a dozen more! — shall know him for a scoundrel and a robber! He dares to run for Governor, does he? The drunken *poseur*! The damned hypocrite! He shall be jail-bird again and once for all, when I am through with him! He shall lie and rot with a chain and ball on his leg! He —"

He stopped. A needled stab of pain had darted, like a bee's sting, through his brow, beneath the bandage, and there flashed to him suddenly the warning of the surgeon, on the day he had left the hospital in Buda-Pesth: "... the tiniest hemorrhage in the affected area and all my surgery could not undo —"

He stood still an instant, breathing heavily. Then he caught up his hat and turned to the door.

Treadwell was looking at him curiously. The outburst had tended to reinforce the suspicion that had already come to him as to the other's mental

condition. "What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"I am going to the Penitentiary, the physical record of the prisoner is there. I shall have it when I come back. I presume you would call that evidence?"

"The best — if the measurements proved identical with Sevier's. I daresay he would be willing to submit to the test," Treadwell added, thoughtfully. "— And then?"

"The election is day after to-morrow. I shall wait till the polls have closed, naturally, before I show him up. A convict, or one who has served a penal term, under the state constitution, can hold no office of public trust. I am advised that the new ticket is likely to win. The Trust's candidate will be next in the running, and with Sevier out, must be declared elected. Where will Sevier receive the returns?"

"At Midfields, I imagine," Treadwell replied. "It's the committee headquarters. Governor Evland of your State is to be a guest there, I hear. He's very much interested in this campaign, being something of a reformer himself."

"So much the better! The Governor himself shall ask for the warrant for Sevier's arrest. We will go there that evening."

"We!" repeated Treadwell.

"Yes. You will come with me — as my attorney."

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"But I don't approve the step!" protested the other. "I consider the whole affair preposterous!"

"I am under the impression," retorted Craig, darkly, "that you are still under my retainer — not Sevier's."

Treadwell flushed. "If you put it in that way," he said stiffly, "I shall of course accompany you. But you have my legal opinion."

Craig jerked the door open.

"I'll meet you at Midfields at eight that evening," he said.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE LIGHTED FUSE

IN the Warden's office at the Penitentiary next morning — the same room Harry Sevier had entered when he had first stepped under the gloomy prison archway — Craig stood staring out of the open window across the yellow courtyard. The last move in the game was at hand — the game he had made up his mind now to play out alone, to the last card.

He had not taken the Warden into his confidence, though he had sat talking with him for a half hour. From him he had heard the tale of the escape of prisoner No. 239 — a tender subject with the official, but one in which his influential visitor had exhibited a particular interest. To the Warden the latter's concern for a scoundrel who had come within an ace of murdering him seemed natural enough. It would be in keeping with Craig's determined and vindictive character to exhaust every effort to apprehend the fugitive. To some intention of this sort the Warden had laid his caller's further inquiries concerning the pickpocket who had been the missing man's cell-mate.

Craig, however, had had reason of another sort. It had chagrined him to learn that with the prisoner

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had disappeared the record-card on which he had counted as a piece of tangible evidence. But this was not an essential, since, once denounced, Harry Sevier would be put upon the defensive, and the one conclusive and natural defence — an alibi — he could not furnish. In the meantime, however, the sensational accusation should be supported, and what more to this purpose than the convict who had shared No. 239's very cell? Promise of a pardon — he could arrange that with the Board — would make the fellow tractable, and he could take him with him on parole.

The plan in his mind had leaped into action. He had expressed a wish to talk with Paddy the Brick and the Warden had sent for him. Craig was waiting the man's coming now, as he stood looking across the yard toward the vast round dormitory that tossed back the rumble of the toiling shops. There was an evil gloating in the fixed, speculative eyes — in imagination Craig was seeing Harry Sevier once more a denizen of that dismal place, a felon, and irrevocably shamed now in name and fame.

The door opened and a turnkey entered, a figure in striped clothes with him.

"Here's your man, Mr. Craig," said the Warden.

Craig turned from the window and set his eyes on Paddy the Brick. He gave a sudden start which the Warden, who had crossed to his desk and was

searching in its pigeon-holes, did not see. Paddy the Brick shrank back, and a quick gleam of fear ran across his pallid features. For each — the would-be murderer and the man he had shot — in the self-same instant recognised the other.

At the fierce anger that blazed in Craig's face Paddy the Brick drew further back, his eyes darting from the man by the window to the Warden and back again, and his hand went instinctively out to the table to clutch a heavy, brass-edged ruler the only weapon at hand. It seemed at the instant that the other was about to leap upon him, to kill him with his working hands. But Craig recovered himself in time. He looked at the Warden.

"I should like to talk with him alone," he said, "if that is permissible."

"Certainly," the Warden answered. "As long as you like," and left the room with the paper he had been looking for.

As the door closed, Craig bent a long look upon the man who stood there. "Don't be a fool," he said. "Put that thing down. I'm not going to hurt you. I want to ask you some questions."

Paddy the Brick laid the ruler down, but he kept the table between them.

"Did you know who the man was who broke into my house with you — the one who was caught?"

The other looked at him cunningly. "The one you swore shot you?"

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Craig's fingers twitched. "Yes," he said, after a pause.

"No. I never saw him before that night."

"What did he pay you for that job?"

Paddy the Brick stared. "Good Lord! *He* wasn't one of us. He just happened in for a social call!" He leaned across the table. "Say," he whispered, "what did you want to hang him for?"

There was in the posture, the whisper, an inexpressible assumption of identity of interest which stung and galled the man who faced him. The blood welled into Craig's face, then very slowly ebbed.

"Would you know him again, if he had changed his appearance? If, for instance, he wore a beard?"

"Know him!" Paddy the Brick jerked his thumb toward the window. "Why, we was mates over there."

Craig looked at him steadily for a moment without speaking. Then he pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said.

At midnight that night the home city of Harry Sevier was ablaze with lights and throbbing with the last feverish activity of a strenuous campaign. The candidate of the new party had returned that afternoon from a tour of the southern portion of the state, and plenteous bunting, everywhere displayed, testified to an enthusiasm that, carefully fostered by

his lieutenants, had permeated every section and class. That evening, to ring down the curtain with a brilliant *finale*, a torchlight procession had been organised. Ten thousand strong, the blazing flambeaux had marched and countermarched along the city's main thoroughfares, and Harry had reviewed them from the balcony of the hotel which was the party's rendezvous.

He had flung himself into the fight with every ounce of his splendid vitality which had been deepened and strengthened by the months of mountain solitude. There was infinitely more at issue now than he had dreamed when he canvassed chances at the bungalow. The cause of the new party had then seemed inevitably a losing one. But during that long campaign — particularly in the last few weeks — it had been borne in upon him that the time had been ripe for the venture. Long arrogance and effrontery had borne their legitimate fruit in a profound resentment that had been fanned to vivid life by the quickening breath. There had been an erasure of old lines, and at length the party in power, aroused and desperate, had found itself fighting for its life. There were no odds offered that day on its victory! Once committed, however, there had been no turning back possible. Harry's bridges had been burned behind him. He could only go forward, and, fighting on, he had striven to thrust his problem, with its increasing implications, into the background of his mind. And in

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spite of himself the zest of victory had absorbed him. To-night's parade had been an inspiring spectacle and it had called from him the last speech of the campaign.

As he closed, amid the shouting and applause, a motor drew up at the curb and stopped just before the hotel entrance. On its rear seat, shielded from the gaze of the pavement by the leather hood, was Cameron Craig, and beside the chauffeur sat Paddy the Brick.

The crowds thinned, began to melt away; here and there the golden square of a window went black on the quieting street. Still the car made no move. At length a little knot of men issued from the hotel lobby, pausing in the lighted doorway to say good night to one another. Craig leaned forward.

"The one in the centre," he said, in a low voice. "The one with the beard."

As he spoke, Harry Sevier's look crossed the pavement and met squarely Craig's envenomed gaze. He saw the heavy head thrust forward from the hood, with the white bandage across the temple and under it the smouldering, implacable eyes. For a space that seemed interminable the eyes held each other. A ghastly expression crossed his face. Very slowly he turned and re-entered the lobby.

Brent, who was the last to leave him, looked at him anxiously.

"You're about all in," he said. "You look positively ill."

Harry tried to smile.

"It's nothing. I think I'll rest now." His voice had all at once lost its *timbre*, had become flat and expressionless. All the electric force, the fire and enthusiasm, had faded from it.

Brent held out his hand. "Thank heaven it's over — all but the voting!" he said fervently. "It's the reaction, I suppose."

"Yes," replied Harry, dully. "No doubt it's the reaction."

He turned and went slowly to the elevator.

In the automobile at the curb Craig touched Paddy the Brick on the shoulder. "Well?" he asked. "Is he number 239?"

Paddy the Brick looked at him with a white fury distorting his features.

"I don't know whether he's 239 or not," he said, "but I'd swear to anything that would 'fix' him! That's the lawyer that let them send me up two years ago!"

CHAPTER XLV

THE CHASM

THE elevator deposited Harry at the third floor, where was the suite of rooms that he had occupied while in town during the campaign, as being more accessible than his own apartment. The outer chamber of the suite was set with all the paraphernalia of a committee-room, with a huge writing-table and several small desks holding telegraph instruments installed to receive the returns. To-morrow would find it humming with excitement, but it was deserted now. He had given Suzuki, his valet, the evening off.

He shut the door and stood a moment leaning against it. His eyes were blank, his face set. He had not known of Cameron Craig's journey abroad, nor in the rush of the campaign had he seen the newspaper paragraph which told of the success of the operation in Buda-Pesth. But in the single look across the pavement he had leaped to the truth. Craig had recovered his faculties — there had been full knowledge and vengeful purpose in the haggard eyes. What he had dreaded, the possibility which he had of late locked in an inner chamber of his mind, had come to pass. All was finished! The Sword of Damocles was about to fall!

What remained? To creep away, like a dastard, he, the leader in the fight? To fly, like the discovered thief, as he had once thought of doing? Even that was impossible now. He knew his enemy too well to suppose that he would have left that way open! The other was but playing with him, like a cat with a mouse, till the moment came to publicly denounce him. For with a kind of prescience he guessed Craig's real purpose, to seize the climactic moment and abstract from his humiliation the last ounce of sensationalism.

All night, in the silent, empty apartment, under the brilliant lights, Harry strode up and down — up and down tirelessly, his face white, his hands clenched, confronting the blank wall that reared before him. Temptation, in its most insidious form, fell upon him. Why should he not brazen it out? After all, the burden of proof was upon his accuser. He had destroyed the record-card which had held his physical measurements. Jubilee Jim could be depended upon to swear to his presence at the bungalow through the winter: wild horses would drag no other story from his faithful lips. Simple and God-fearing as the old negro was, love for his master was one of the prime articles of his emotional and uncomplex religion. For that love he would unquestioningly risk even the fires of the material hell of which his Bible told him! Such an alibi would hold. What other proof could Craig bring forward, further than a fortuitous resemblance, ma-

terially weakened now by hair and beard, to a one-time convict in a penitentiary in another state?

Was he not doubly justified in this deception? He was really innocent. If he foreswore himself a thousand times, it would be in the way both of justice and expediency. It would solve the problem. The new Cause needed him. Had he any right to fling himself away, merely in the interest of fictitious truth, on the mawkish principle of "Thou shalt not do evil that good may come"?

Yet, to perjure himself! To know himself liar and hypocrite, even in the hour when he should kiss the holy volume in the vows of a high office? He who even in that past that had been clouded by egoistic eccentricity and marred by dissipation, had always counted an oath sacred! To bind that faithful servant on the mountain to a black perjury — which would shadow his imagination with the smoke of the eternal burning!

There came to him suddenly the memory of words that had woven with the fevered imaginings of his illness on the mountain — words of Jubilee Jim's prayer:

"Dey tek yo' darlin' son . . . en put er crown o' tho'ns on he beautiful haid, en he ain' done nuthin' 'cep'n good. Ah don' keer what Marse Harry have on; Ah reck'n when he come lak dis, yo' gwine he'p me he'p him — kase dat what he done fo' me!"

The stumbling, broken accents seemed to strike

across the void. What if, instead of the great machine of recompense that he had distinguished in that prison experience, there were indeed a personal God, as Jubilee Jim believed, throned in his vast white heaven of glory — a God pitiful for the agony of his human creatures. Would he look down now and hear his cry for help? Harry flung himself suddenly on his knees, and leaned his forehead against the dark wainscoting. He knew that he uttered no word, but all his being seemed to resolve itself into an inarticulate cry for aidance. It was the first appeal of his life to something outside of himself, the first cry of human weakness, groping in its utter hopelessness for the Infinite. It was the last step of the long way Harry had travelled — from self-abasement to remorse and awakening conscience, through struggle with appetite to victory over himself, self-abnegation, acquiescence in the great law of retribution, and finally, in his despair, to prayer.

And out of the deep to which he had called, calmness at length came to him, and with it a clear and steady purpose. As dawn took down the red drawbars of the sky to let in the day, he threw open a shutter and stood looking down with aching eyes upon the drowsily-waking street. There should be no lying denial, no cowardly evasion — nothing less than the naked truth. If fate, if God, demanded this last thing of him — if only so could he balance

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the account — he would not repine. He had fought the fight, and at the last, so far as he could, he would keep the faith!

Before the hotel had awakened, Harry was in his own apartment. He had left a note for Brent, who was to be in charge at the hotel suite, saying briefly that he should not appear that day, but would be with the Committee at eight o'clock. He had sent the same message also to Judge Allen. He told Suzuki to admit no one, disconnected his telephone, and thereafter remained at his desk writing, a plate of sandwiches at his elbow, bending himself to the final arrangement of the details of his personal affairs, as he might have done, he thought once, if by some clairvoyancy he foresaw that to-morrow he would die. Death, indeed, would have been a welcome solution if by it he could have bought extrication. Was he not going, living, to a worse death than he should ever die?

As the mantel-clock struck seven, he laid the last written paper in the desk-drawer and rising, went into his dressing-room. He bathed and dressed, the last time in his life, he told himself, that he should don the evening habilaments of a gentleman — grave-clothes! For the blow would not be delayed. To-morrow, no doubt, the state would ring with his downfall. To-night — in the hour of his victory, if victory should be his — he would write *finis* to the final chapter and surrender himself to the law.

It was just at the half-hour when Harry opened the outer door of his apartment. But he did not pass through. Three men had been waiting silently just across the threshold. One of them was Craig. They entered without a word, Craig shut the door and one of the others took his stand before it.

CHAPTER XLVI

CRAIG STRIKES

SEVIER had stepped back as they entered. He had not been startled at the ambush; he had gone past surprises. He was conscious only of a cold preparedness and a kind of dull wonder as to the form of their errand. The purpose in Craig's face left no cause for any speculation as to their intent. He looked at the other's two companions, perfect types of the "heeler," burly and with brutally-cunning features, that wore now a gloze of satisfaction in the work that was forward. They were not in uniform — it was not an arrest, then. What did Craig intend to do? He turned, set his hat on the hall table and passed into the sitting-room.

Craig followed him. Harry now saw that he carried a compact bundle under his arm. He snapped the cord and disclosed a costume — jacket and trousers of black and yellow-grey stripes and a flat, peaked cap of dingy canvas. Around one arm of the jacket was a leathern band which bore a metal number — 239!

"Put them on," commanded Craig shortly. "Over what you are wearing. They'll be large enough."

A painful mist was before Harry's eyes. He understood. Craig meant to give him up stamped with the old felon character, clothed in the unmistakable livery of the convict! Well, if not to-night, to-morrow. What did it matter?

As he drew on the loathsome garments, buttoning the jacket close up to his chin, their very touch seemed to cling insupportably to his flesh. The smell of the coarse fulled cloth in his nostrils gave him a qualm as of actual physical sickness, and the feel of the canvas cap across his forehead burned it like a brand.

Craig had taken from his pocket a black cloth mask. "Now this," he said. "I believe you wore one in your last burglary," he added with cold malevolence. "I am disposed to miss no realistic touch, believe me."

Harry put on the mask, whose lower hem fell below his beard. Through its eye-holes he looked evenly at the sneering, implacable face opposite. A peculiar apathy had come to him. The wide humiliation — even the cheap and ghastly sensationalism of the mask did not touch him. Like the hapless voyeur caught in the rapids above the great falls, he was watching the nearing brink with a kind of fascination and with the roar of the cataract in his ears.

One of the men had opened a window to peer down into the street. "All clear," he announced briefly, and Craig went to the hall and opened the door.

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A monster limousine with curtains drawn waited at the curb, and on the front seat sat a figure at whose pallid face and red-rimmed eyes Harry gazed without a start but with a strange sensation of fitness. Here indeed was the real thief who had shot Craig, but leagued now with his enemy to his undoing!

Sitting in the dark interior, as the car sped along with its silent company, Harry remembered another ride of two years before, when he had flung through the night flying from his own conscience, incarnate in the figure that now rode beside the chauffeur. Was he never to lay that old ghost? He noted dully that the streets were jostling with eager throngs which made compact eddies here and there before some newspaper bulletin-board or flaring club-window which displayed the reports of the voting, as, township by township, county by county, the tally came in. On one the legend was being posted, "*Sevier Leads*," and a muffled cheer was wafted after. He shut his eyes. Almost he could have thought himself in the grip of some *outré*, high-coloured dream — but he knew that it was no dream.

The limousine slowed and stopped. Harry turned his head as the door opened; they were at the gate of Midfields.

As they neared the upper end of the drive, a man rose from the steps and came toward them. It was Lawrence Treadwell. He started as if he had been stung at sight of the masked and striped

figure between its stolid escort. He turned on Craig, his eyes blazing with amazement and anger.

"My God!" he cried. "You haven't dared — but this is infamous. It's an outrage! You —"

"Keep your place!" ground Craig. "I tell you I know what I'm doing!"

"It's my private opinion you're as crazy as a March hare," retorted the other, "but if you *are* right, I'll have nothing to do with it, do you understand? Nothing! I don't care *what* your damned evidence is!"

Craig turned his back on him and led the way up the steps, and after an instant's hesitation Treadwell followed. Through an open window Harry glimpsed the interior of the east room, dismantled now for the evening's strenuous occupation, where several masculine figures were grouped about a table, excitedly working over charts, and he could hear the irritant buzz of the telephone as it signalled the bulletins that were beginning now to pour into the busy hotel suite at the other end of the wire. Craig did not ring at the big door but led the way along the porch to a French-window, of the library, which stood ajar. He peered into it, then with an exclamation of satisfaction motioned the two attendants back, said a low word to Paddy the Brick at his heels, and flung the window open.

Sevier entered, Craig and his stool-pigeon next. Treadwell followed and drew the window to behind him.

CHAPTER XLVII

WITH HIS BACK TO THE WALL

IN the wide, lamp-lighted room into which this weird quartette had so startlingly entered, before the capacious fireplace two men had been sitting smoking — Judge Allen and his friend Governor Eveland. At the sudden apparition both had turned sharply toward the window — two strangely dissimilar figures: the Judge slight and spare and scholarly, his pale, finely-chiselled features tinged in the glow; the other deep-chested and powerful, of herculean mould, with a rugged face made almost patriarchal by the long grey beard which swept his chest: both countenances for the instant curiously alike in their expression of shocked surprise.

The Judge arose abruptly from his chair, his gaze shifting from the masked figure in striped clothes to Craig's face, eagerly alight and triumphant. He had no welcome for this summary entrance.

"Who is responsible for this intrusion?" he asked coldly.

Craig laughed. "I am responsible," he said. "I have business with you both. For some time, as you are aware, I have been debarred from such pursuits. However, I am now myself again, and free to pick up lost threads. Hence my call to-night."

"It can wait a more opportune time." The Judge spoke with asperity. "Moreover, I must ask you to remember that I have servants to announce my guests."

"Apologies may be in order later," Craig returned, "if my errand does not justify itself. My business with you is to inform you that you and your friends have been giving countenance to a man whom the law is tracking down — a convict who escaped from prison in the next state some months ago. You see him before you." He looked at the Governor, who had neither moved nor spoken — he had small liking for Cameron Craig. "My business with you, Governor Eveland, is to demand that you call upon the local authorities to arrest this jailbird, pending his extradition to your own jurisdiction. I have brought with me, under my personal surety, an inmate of the penitentiary" — he pointed to Paddy the Brick — "who was this criminal's cellmate and who has identified him."

There was a slight pause before the Governor replied. He had shared his host's irritation at the unceremonious entrance and this was allayed by no regard for Craig, whom he had always reckoned an evil influence in the activities of the state of which he himself was Chief Executive. Now the pallid face with its bandage across one temple, the distempered eyes and strange excitement, smote him with distaste.

"I like neither your method nor your manner,

Mr. Craig. This would seem to be a matter for the police, not for me, nor, I take it, for Judge Allen. Why you choose to drag this man here, at such a moment, with this skulduddery of mask and stripes, I cannot imagine."

Craig laughed again, sneeringly. "A little fancy of my own, and regard for the dramatic proprieties . . ."

Treadwell strode forward with an exclamation.

"Judge — Governor Eveland!" he said explosively. "Let me say something. I came here to-night purely in my capacity of Cameron Craig's attorney, intent only on saving him from what seemed to me a piece of brazen lunacy. But I begin to see that there is something behind this, and if it isn't lunacy it is something I like still less. I withdraw here and now from any connection with him or this action —"

"Withdraw and be damned!" Craig flung him, savagely. "I know what I am about!" His voice rose. "That man, Governor Eveland, is an escaped prisoner from the penitentiary of your state! Tear off his mask and see for yourselves who our 'John Doe' really is — this fine thief and would-be murderer — the man who shot me down a year ago!"

"Stop!" The Governor's voice rang through the room. He was on his feet now, stern authority in every line of his posture. "Mr. Craig, listen to me! You have thrust yourself here without war-

rant of right or of invitation, in a matter which you — not I — have elected to make my business. Very well: I take the affair and this prisoner into my own hands. Do you understand?"

He paused, his lips clipped to like shears. Craig's outburst, vicious with suppressed fury, had given him a lightning-like glimpse into something unguessed in the situation. The man before him, then, in this convict dress, was the burglar convicted of that old shooting — the prisoner whom he had seen at the court-house, and whose personality had so attracted and puzzled him. Yet there was more beneath Craig's attitude than an understandable desire to punish the man who had shot him: more than that in those infuriate eyes, shaking hands and malicious triumph. The Governor had a hatred of persecution. His mind worked according to a law of stern and inflexible justice, yet to him justice opened itself to no assault of man's passions.

Under that holding look Craig sat down heavily, angry arrogance in his face. Treadwell took a chair near him, and Paddy the Brick remained standing in the background, his small eyes glancing furtively from one to the other.

The Governor resumed his seat and bent his deliberate gaze on the figure that had been standing movelessly before him. A quick memory had come to him of the other's face, now hidden, as he remembered to have once seen it — clear-eyed, vivid and forceful, strangely lacking in the ear-marks of the

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criminal, a face that had often recalled itself to his mind since that day. He had no vulgar curiosity, but the patent mystery in the background called to him strangely.

"Are you, as this man alleges, a prisoner who some months ago broke jail in the adjoining state?"

"I am." The voice, muffled by the mask, was low but distinct.

"The man who shot him in his library?"

"No."

The questioning, deep grey eyes looked steadily at the mask — it seemed as if the gaze would bore through the cloth. "But you were found guilty of that offence!"

"I was convicted, yes."

The Governor was silent a moment; then his hand reached for the pen on the table. "On the admission, then," he said slowly, "it is my duty to request the authorities to take you into custody. You are aware of your rights under the law?"

The striped figure bowed. "I am. I shall waive extradition. With your permission, however, I should like to make a statement."

"He can make that in the jail," interposed Craig contemptuously. "Take off his mask and send for the police."

The Governor frowned. "He can make it here and now, if he so chooses. This is not your house, Mr. Craig. If you do not care to listen, there will

be no objection to your withdrawal — with your witness."

There was a fleeting pause, in which a livid red mounted to Craig's brow, dark against the bandage. Then the Governor turned.

"Do you take your solemn oath that what you are about to say is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do."

The Governor leaned back in his chair. "You may make your statement," he said quietly.

Harry bowed. He was feeling a chill sense of estrangement, as though the bars that were so soon to shut him from the life of which he had been a part had already fallen between him and his friends. But he was oddly self-controlled. In the few moments he had been thinking swiftly — not of himself, but of the cause he represented, the men who had pinned their faith upon him and whom he had betrayed, whose leader, Judge Allen, sat there now ignorant of the ruin that overwhelmed them. To say to him, "I, Harry Sevier, whom you honoured, whom you made the bearer of your party banner, reached forth for this trust knowing myself a hunted man, outlawed of honest folk!" They were his friends, his loyal comrades in the fight, men whose friendship had been tried out by long years! In this last hour he shrank from a judgment biased with

sympathy, and a fierce craving was rising in him for a justification based on no personal appeal.

He took a step backward to the mantel and stood thus, a little removed from them, looking from one to the other. He spoke in a low voice — not the alert, vibrant voice of the old Harry Sevier, but one alien, metallic, and strangely devoid of feeling.

“What I have to say may soon be said. It was not of my own will that I came here with covered face, and since this masquerade is not of my choosing, it may serve its purpose a moment longer. You, Judge Allen, know me well. Governor Eveland, you also are not unacquainted with me. With every one in this room I have come in contact — not as a convict, but as a citizen and an honest man. My association with you, Judge Allen, has involved certain responsibilities, and these I have accepted while I have lain under the law. For this I owe you a greater reparation than I can ever make. I know that justification in the eyes of the world is impossible, but in your own mind — in the minds of others who stand with you — it perhaps may be given me. But a justification is empty to me that springs from personal sympathy. I want it as man to man. For this reason I keep on the mask a little longer.”

He paused. The Governor had not spoken; he had settled back in his great chair, one hand in his beard. The Judge was leaning intently forward, his hands clasped; he had never taken his eyes from the speaker, save once to glance at Craig, who sat

with narrowed eyes and heavy lips curved in a malicious sneer. Treadwell's elbow was on his knee, his chin in his palm, his brows drawn into a frown that told nothing, and behind all stood Paddy the Brick, furtively watching.

When the striped figure spoke again, it was in a voice which held a first thin thrill of feeling:

"I have said that I lay under the law, but it was through that law's error. I was unjustly accused and wrongfully convicted. I was innocent."

The Governor spoke, coldly and deliberately. "You were taken at midnight in the Craig house."

"I had entered it for no dishonest purpose. I broke no bolt nor bar — that had been done before my arrival."

"You allege, then, that you were not in company with the robbers?"

"I was not. They were there when I entered."

"Why did you not give the alarm?"

"They made me their prisoner. A pistol was at my head."

"You did not so testify at your trial."

"I declined to testify at all."

The Governor nodded. "That is true," he said. "I remember."

There was a moment's pause, then the voice continued:

"It is sometimes inevitable that the law, whose purpose it is to be just, is terribly unjust. Sometimes the sole clue to a situation which seems to spell inevi-

table guilt lies in a fact, small in itself, whose significance is such that it cannot be brought forward. This was my case. The fact which would have cleared me could not be told. I became a convict. For six months I was an inmate of the Penitentiary. Then — the way opened to freedom, and I took it. What man would not have done so? I acknowledged no right of the law over my body. I went back to my former life, and took up my old profession here in this city."

"Here!" The Judge muttered, under his breath.

"And in that life I found opening responsibilities. New work called to me. My help was needed. I could not shirk it. I knew the risk always, but I counted it small. And the need was great! With such a work waiting my hand, a labour that no one else, it seemed, could do — one upon which much depended — was I to stand aside, to withhold my effort on the slender chance that discovery might sometime overtake me?"

The speaker seemed to have forgotten the Governor, to have swept all else to one side and to be addressing now only the Judge, in an appeal that touched the older man profoundly. It was, he thought, as though the man's whole soul was crying out in some sense for forgiveness and absolution for an injury unwittingly inflicted.

"The one thing has happened now which must lay the past bare. I must meet this — the scandal,

the shame. My life, all that makes life worth living, ends to-night, and I stand before you with the bare soul of a truthful man. You have known me and trusted me. You — and others — have put faith in me. . . .” The voice, for the first time, faltered and fell.

The Judge’s head had been bowed, but he lifted it now.

“God alone knows the secrets of our hearts,” he said, heavily. “If you were innocent — but of that how can I say? My view of your actions since your escape — those which may affect me — must necessarily hang upon that point. I could believe that you are not a burglar. It may be that knowledge of your true identity will presently convince me of this. And I might be persuaded that your presence in the Craig house that night was no more than an unfortunate coincidence. But the evidence of the shooting appeared at the time irrefutable. I cannot conceive that the mere knowledge of what you are would be likely to affect my belief in that respect. Your statement as to that is not only wholly unsupported, but was — and is — bluntly contradicted by the man who was shot.”

He ceased speaking. No word came from the striped figure, only a slight movement of one hand, expressing at once resignation and futility. Then the hand lifted to the mask.

The Governor, however, stayed the action of revealment with a sudden gesture.

"One moment," he said quickly. "We have gone so far, I should like to go a step further — and still forensically, if you please. The question of identity may wait. Do I understand that you deny that you fired that shot?"

"I do."

Craig lurched forward in his chair. "This is no trial court!" he exclaimed savagely. "He has had his hearing once."

"Be silent!" commanded the Governor. "This man is in my hands, not in yours!" The warning was heavy and vengeful, and it held now all the electric energy of the man that had made him famous through a long career of criminal practice before his Governorship days, and that now, unleashed, dominated the room. Before it Craig whitened with a surge of anger that sent a keen probe of pain through his temple. He sat back, breathing hard, his great fingers working on the arms of his chair.

The Governor was leaning forward now, his hand on the table.

"If I recollect — and I think I do, as certain aspects of the case interested me at the time — there was a witness to the shooting beside the men who were assumed to be your comrades. There was a woman there."

"She did not see my face."

"But she might have seen the face of the shooter. Why did she not see yours?"

"I wore a mask."

"Is not a mask, in itself, a badge of criminal intent?"

"It was not mine. One of the men dropped it when they ran."

"If, being innocent," the Governor went on, "you put on the mask, the only presumption is that you did not wish the woman to recognise you. Therefore, she knew. Did you speak to her?"

There was no reply.

"If you spoke to her, it was when the man who had fired the shot was in flight. Your words to her, verified by herself — if she were reputable — would be evidence that you did not do the shooting. Why then, did you not call her as a witness?"

The long French-window had swung again ajar and the cooling evening breeze rustled the paper that lay upon the table. From the far road there came a muffled, long-drawn cheer, that trailed across the tense silence of the room.

"If the significant fact which could be brought forward at your trial was the identity of this missing witness; if her testimony would show that the law had erred — if it might operate to establish your innocence — would not she herself justify you in revealing it?"

The silence, a longer one this time, remained unbroken.

"Do you still refuse to tell the name of the woman?"

"I do."

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The Governor leaned to the table and picked up the pen. But in the instant there was a quick step behind them.

All turned. Echo stood framed in the window — a figure in filmy white, against which a single rose glowed like a hot ruby.

"I was that woman, Governor Eveland," she said clearly.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE HEART OF A WOMAN

FOR an instant there was a blank silence. The Judge sat as if stunned, one hand across his lips, the other clenched on his knee. Harry's breath had caught in his throat; he stood taken aback and confounded, his thought shocked apart and dispersed as a street explosion dissipates a crowd of pedestrians. He forgot all else, was conscious only of the deep fire of her eyes and the white surge of her breast, only that he loved her and that she stood on the brink of ruin — she whose name was unspotted from the world! An irrepressible exclamation burst from his lips.

The Governor put up his hand. "We will have the truth!" he said sternly.

He sat erect in his chair, his bushy brows drawn together, his compelling eyes holding Echo's. Slowly he turned his grey head toward Craig.

"It was Miss Allen," said Craig. His smouldering gaze had fastened on her with a savage joy. The drama was rushing now to its inevitable *dénouement*.

The crisis had come to Echo with fateful suddenness. From the porch — whither she had stolen, full of excitement, to listen to the bulletins from the

east room that spelled victory for the cause of Harry Sevier — she had glimpsed through the French window that gathering in the library — the striped masked figure standing as before his judges, Craig with his bandaged temple, the silent listeners. The mask and the convict garb recalled that terrible midnight at Craig's house and the later episode at the jail, blent in a shuddering composite, even as the significance of the scene came home to her with a sudden horrifying clarity. It was true then; Craig had returned recovered! The escaped convict had been retaken, and he had come forward to repeat his mistaken testimony! In her confusion of mind she did not reason: it did not occur to her that here was no tribunal of justice. The suggestion was overpowering: she only knew that within that room men sat again in judgment upon him with whose fate her own peace of mind was so entangled. And she knew the truth! In the swift surprise the shame and horror of the publicity which had wrestled with her pain of conscience during the weeks succeeding her visit to the jail and the baleful certitude it had brought, rolled over her anew with the anguished dread of Harry Sevier's contempt. But there was no wavering: the fight had been fought out once for all, and she had waited for Craig's revelation with outer calmness, though with her blood stilling to an icy current in her veins. Two things had come to her at the same instant: Craig did not intend to involve her, and the convict knew who she was. As

she leaned against the sill listening, the meaning of that obstinate refusal to answer had thrilled her. He, like Craig, had known her, then, all along. Yet he had not betrayed her, nor would he betray her even now! The thought had spurred her resolve and sent her forward into the room with that confession on her lips.

She came forward slowly, with what seemed a pathetic weariness. Her face was without colour and there were bruised shadows beneath her eyes, but above them her amber hair was like sunbeams in a mesh of gold.

"Governor Eveland," she said, "you have known me all my life. I do not think you have ever had cause to doubt my word."

"There is no need to remind me of that, my child," he answered, gravely. "Neither I nor any one who knows you, would believe you spoke anything but the truth."

A wan smile, in which was yet a glint of pride, crossed her face. "Then," she said, "I have faith that you will believe me now. I went to that house to gain a thing dearer than my own happiness. No one at home knew it. I did so secretly — my parents believed that I had gone to visit my aunt."

She paused an instant, and turned upon Craig a look of mingled scorn and aversion. "This man had once done me the honour to ask me to marry him, and I had done myself the honour to refuse. He had in his hands — how it had come to him I

have never known — a letter which he threatened to publish. It was a personal letter that had no bearing on the present — one written before I was born — but it had the power to bring pain and humiliation upon some one I loved.”

The Judge lifted his head; his eyes were moist and shining. “That is true,” he said, in a smothered voice. “I knew of the letter, and — of the threat.”

She did not proceed at once; her gaze was still upon Craig, and she waited.

“It is true enough,” he said, and burst into jarring laughter. “Yes, gentlemen. It is the fact. I had that letter and I would have made my price on it!” He looked from one to the other challengingly, the arrogance and unscrupulousness of the man leaping in his eyes. But no one spoke. Only Treadwell, his eyes averted, moved his chair a little further from him.

“Yes,” she repeated, deliberately. “You made your price. I went there that night, to your house, to beg you for that letter. I waited for you till you came, and when you would not give it to me otherwise, I agreed to marry you.”

She faced the Governor again. “I was to marry him within the hour. Then — then came the shot from the alcove. I was mad with fright and with fear. There had been three men behind the curtains. Two ran — the man who had done the shooting and another. The third —”

She broke off and turned to the motionless figure

in the striped clothes. "I know now that you were the third!" she said. "I thank you — with all my heart I thank you, for what you did!"

There was no answer from behind the mask, and she again addressed the Governor:

"This man must have heard my pleading and pitied me. He thought of me before he thought of his own escape. He took the letter I had come for from the safe and gave it to me, then dragged me to the door and told me to run. So I—I got away."

The room was so still that one heard now, through the closed doors, the muffled click of the telegraph keys in the east-room, and the voices of the clerks calling the tally of figures. Wistfulness and pain had crept into her voice now.

"Next day the newspapers said that the man who had fired the shot had been arrested. I believed this to be true, for though I went one day to the trial, I was in the court-room only a few moments and I could not see the face of the man who was being tried."

The striped figure made a sudden involuntary movement. She had not seen him, then? Could it be that he had been mistaken, that she had not known? Harry's heart began to beat violently.

"I believed it till months afterward, when I came back from Europe. Then I saw a ring which this man had given to his lawyer. It was like the one the man who had given me the letters had worn that

night, and this made me afraid that a mistake had been made. I visited the Penitentiary to find out. It was the day of the attack on the warden — when this man was stabbed in his defence."

Again she paused and her eyes shifted to the masked figure. "You must have known me," she said gently. "You must have known my name. Yet you never told. Do you think, whatever it might mean to me — after what you did — that I could keep silent, if the truth may help you now?"

Sevier had no answer. Through and through the maze of his conflicting feeling was stabbing an assurance sharpened with unbelievable joy. He had been thinking her cowardly and calloused with worldly selfishness; here she was risking all — and not for him, Harry Sevier, whom she loved, but for an unknown convict!

The Governor was looking at her with intentness. "You mean that he is *not* the one who did the shooting?"

"He is not."

Craig sneered. "She says what she has been told to say," he said with dry lips. "You will understand why, presently."

"Perhaps," returned the Governor, coldly, "I shall." Then, turning to Echo —

"How do you know this is not the man?"

"This man is tall; the man who did the shooting was short."

"But — his face. You saw it that night dis-

tinctly? Would you know it if you saw it again?"

"As well as I know yours."

He said no more, and after an instant's pause, she went on:

"Mr. Mason, his lawyer, had told me he believed that if the shooting could have been disproved, his client might have been cleared, and knowing what I did, it seemed to me that I must tell the whole. It — was not easy, for while that night I had thought only of keeping the secret of the letter, I came to see later what the world would say of my presence there. And a woman's name is all she has. So . . . I made up my mind. But that same day I read that the man had escaped from prison. There seemed no longer any need then of my telling. There had been no need till now."

She stopped, and stood looking steadily at the Governor, her hands twisted together, her face white. She was far less vividly conscious of him, however, and of all the others — Craig, her father, Treadwell — than of one whom she thought far away, but who now, sometime or other, must know!

The Governor spoke, quietly and evenly:

"Let us go back to a matter of detail. I should like to picture the scene that night a little more distinctly. Where were you standing when the shot was fired?"

She changed her position slightly. "Here, nearly in the centre of the room."

"And the man who shot from the alcove?"

"There." She pointed one side, to the bay-window, before which now stood Paddy the Brick.

The latter would have drawn away, but the Governor stayed him with a gesture. "No, stand where you are, if you please," he said. And Paddy the Brick stood still, shifting his feet and ill-at-ease, his narrow eyes turning stealthily toward Craig.

To Echo the illusion was considerable, for the room was not unlike that other library in which had occurred the scene she was so painfully redrawing. There was the same effect of rich bookcases, of desk and picture-hung walls, and in lieu of the alcove was the big double window with its heavy drawn curtains. The Governor stretched his hand and tilted the shade of the lamp, so that its light fell full upon the latter, lighting the cringing face of the stool-pigeon before it.

"What was the man who shot like?" he asked.

"He was middle-sized and thick-set, with light hair that sprang in a cowlick from his forehead. He . . ."

She had stopped abruptly. She was staring with wide, horrified eyes at the man who stood blinking in the radiance—at the up-thrust, sand-coloured hair, the rounded shoulders, the red-rimmed eyes, which now held a trapped look of animal fear.

She stiffened. She pointed at him.

"*You!*" she cried. "*You are the man who fired that shot!*"

CHAPTER XLIX

THE GOVERNOR TAKES A HAND

ON the startled silence, already so tense with conflicting forces, the accusation fell with the suddenness of an electric shock.

Its effect on Paddy the Brick was instantaneous. He drew back, his hand clutching at the curtains. He was looking not at Echo, but past her, at the Governor, who had risen towering in his place, and if ever guilt and the dread that is confession showed upon a face, it was written upon his, in lines unmistakable that he who ran might read.

Craig started from his seat. "You fool!" he snarled at him.

But Paddy the Brick gave him no glance. The fear of the hunted was upon him; he saw himself taken in a snare, the witnesses to his unpunished act confronting him, and clutching at him the hand of the Law. He turned, and with one desperate jerk, tore the hangings aside, and with arms before his face, plunged bodily through the shattering glass of the bay-window to the garden.

So abrupt and fateful had been the crash of his headlong flight, that for a breath it seemed as if all there had been turned to stone. Craig first found voice.

"Enough of this farce!" he cried. "Governor Eveland, this man is an escaped convict, and I call upon you to do your duty!"

The Governor turned swiftly on him, his cavernous eyes flashing fire. His long forefinger shot out like a javelin.

"You coward and blackmailer!" he blazed. "The man you brought here as your witness was the one who shot you! His very flight is confession. And I believe *you knew he was the guilty one!*" His deep voice rang like a bell, quick with indignation and contempt. "You hate this man before you, and when he came between you and your plan, you tried to lie the noose about his neck!"

Craig's face was convulsed, his hands moving in distorted gestures. A writhing spot of pain was bubbling like a white-hot coal beneath the bandage on his temple. He burst into a wild laugh.

"Damn your beliefs!" he shouted. "You know who I am! The whole state knows me! What I swore to I'll swear to again. You can't make black into white by your opinions. This man is a convict — a *convict!* Do you hear? He is under sentence . . ."

The Governor had seated himself at the table and was writing swiftly. He looked up now.

"And I," he thundered, "am Governor. As such, I don't care who he is. I don't want to know. It is enough that I am convinced of his innocence,

as I am of your perjury. Here is his pardon. From this moment he is free!"

He rose, and if honest indignation could have blasted, his look would have blasted the man who stood livid and gasping before him:

"Let me tell you one thing more, Cameron Craig! If you dare to drag his name or that of this woman into publicity now, to satisfy your mean revenge, I'll see that you are indicted, so help me God! We shall find whose testimony will be believed!"

Craig, swaying now on suddenly numb and uncertain feet, would have shouted too, but his tongue seemed tied and a heavy torpor was clutching all his limbs. He heard his own voice come forth ragged and broken:

"I — I dare! You — this —!"

Tottering, he lurched to a chair and fell into it, even as the Governor's look took on a glare of outraged astonishment — for Craig's face now was drawn and contorted into a malignant grimace. But all at once this faded out, the features became expressionless, the eyes dull, and he slipped in a huddle from the chair to the floor.

He lay there upon his face without a word or movement. He did not hear the Governor's exclamation nor the voices about him, nor feel the touch of inquiring hands at heart and wrist. His passion had undone him. The dulling pulse beat on, but the brain had once more ceased its functioning; nor would it ever again quicken that inert body, at

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the behest of the great surgeon in Buda-Pesth or of any other.

Outside in the hall there were confusion and wondering voices, as the Governor, bending his great frame to the burden, with the aid of the Judge and other willing hands, bore the helpless, sagging form to the car that waited at the foot of the drive with its attendants. Before he followed the rest, Treadwell had turned and held out his hand to the man in the convict dress, and there was in the gesture, no less than the warm clasp, assurance man to man of steadfast silence and a friendship that was to be without end.

In the silent room — in a quiet that seemed curiously heavy after the storm of ebullient passion and pain that had swept it — Echo, sitting stirless but with every vein throbbing painfully, saw the striped figure pass behind the big leathern screen, to emerge a moment later, still wearing the mask but clad now in the conventional black-and-white of masculine evening-dress. In his hand he carried a striped bundle. He laid this on the red coals of the grate and the flames leaped up to wind it in a mass of brightness, shaming, for one triumphant minute, the dim light of the shaded lamp. As he stood with his back to her, looking down upon the smouldering tinder, some trick in the posture brought her a quick thrill of wretchedness. In the radiance she buried her face in her hands.

“ Echo ! ”

She started and looked up with a sudden wildness, for the cry seemed weirdly to have materialised from the very substance of her longing. The figure had turned from the fireplace — was standing before her — with uncovered face !

CHAPTER L

REVELATION

“YOU!” she said. *“You — you!”*

“Yes.”

With her eyes upon him she moved away with uncertain, backward steps. When she spoke again it was with a quick breath that was like a sob, and in a voice scarcely audible, with breaks between the words: *“It is — it was — you —”*

“It was I.”

“You!”

“Yes.”

“All — the time?”

“All the time.”

There was a silence. She had begun to tremble from head to foot. Her face was turned away and her hands were shaking; she clenched them tight. Her voice fell lower, till it was the merest whisper:

“You were the — the convict — the man — in Craig’s library?”

He came nearer. **“Yes,”** he said.

She put one hand to her throat. *“I — don’t care to understand — now. I — I’m only trying — to realise —”* She paused. The doming tinder in the fire-place broke and fell, and for a last instant a yellow-ochre burst of flame threw a bright golden veil about them. Two great tears rolled down her

cheeks. "Then you," she whispered, "then you know why I went there. You could not believe that I — that I —"

"My darling!" His arms were around her now, crushing her to him with tender fierceness, till she could feel his heart thudding against her breast, and the blossom crushed there held for him the scent of all the roses of all the world. He bent his head and their lips clung into a kiss. "Never — never — that!" he murmured, with his lips against her cheek, "though I must be forgiven very much. I was blind. I thought you knew — knew that it was really I there in the prison, knew and were willing that it should be! And all the while . . ."

"And I," she whispered, "I thought you had gone away, and didn't care — any more. And all along — all along . . ."

When they drew a little apart so that each might better see the other's face, the wonder and miracle had touched them both with a kind of awe. She looked at him with lips that were still trembling under the startled glory in her eyes. "The day after that — that night — I went to your office. I saw my broken picture — and — the bottle. I guessed — I guessed —"

"It was true," he said. "I threw away my promise to you. I would have thrown myself away with it! But it was not to be, sweetheart! I have come back to you, dearest — dearest of all the world!"

So they stood, haloed in the lamp-light, clinging together, swayed and shaken, love and youth and dream melted into one golden eternity, pouring forth tender, sweet confessions in broken words and silences, oblivious to the passage of time, to the clamour that had begun to rise from the rooms across the hall—to a sound that came over the tree-tops of the avenue, blazing now with fireworks, the sound of jubilation and marching feet, drawing nearer and nearer.

At midnight the great porch of Midfields was hung gay with lanterns and bunting and Harry stood watching the rear-guard of torch-bearers stream down the drive. The battalions had gathered like magic when the blowing of whistles announced that the returns from the crucial counties spelled victory beyond peradventure. They had swung down the main street, a band at their head, a shouting, jostling army, to acclaim the Governor-Elect.

With his friends of the long fight—Judge Allen, Brent and a score of others—about him, he had spoken to them, a short speech full of feeling. They, not he, had won the fight, he told them. And the victory was an earnest of the future. But the race was not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong; the forces they had that day vanquished would return to the struggle, and they must be beaten again and again till the State, and every home within its borders, was free forever. Now the cheering

was over and the throngs had trooped away after the band, to parade the denser streets of the business section, while the Committee lingered for an exultant aftermath in the dismantled east room.

As Governor Eveland stood with the Judge on the porch, looking out over the trampled lawn, Treadwell came up the drive.

"I thought," he said, "that you would like to know about Craig. He is as he was before they took him abroad for the operation. It is unlikely that there will ever be any change again, they think."

They heard him in silence, but across the mind of the older man was flashing a stern epitaph — "He hath digged a pit for his neighbour, and hath fallen into the midst of it himself." Presently he sighed — his thought had shifted to the unknown man he had pardoned that night.

"It has been a singular evening," he said. "I am sorry Sevier was not here earlier — when our convict came. Strange that even you, Treadwell, should not have seen his face! I wonder," he added musingly, "if we shall ever know who he was!"

The Judge shook his head — the same wonder was in his mind. Treadwell's face was inscrutable. The Governor's gaze strayed up the long porch where at the further end a girl stood with the Governor-Elect in the rosy glow of the lanterns. He laid his gaunt hand affectionately on the Judge's shoulder.

"Brave and true!" he said. "When I think of

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what she told us tonight, Beverly, I have no words!"

Treadwell broke the silence. He spoke with a little flush mounting in his face, "I hope I need not say that I — that what we have heard to-night —"

But the Judge stopped him. "My dear Treadwell!" he said, in gentle reproof. "My dear Treadwell! We are all gentlemen!"

The Governor-Elect and the girl who stood beside him lingered a little longer in the shadow of the crimson Rambler. Down the avenue beyond the great gate, the flambeaux clustered and faded and diminished, the band music had throbbed to silence and about them was only the silver, dew-silent night. They stood in silence. The old house behind them was full of jovial voices and laughter, and every window was glowing with lights, but where they stood was quiet and peace.

At length he took both her hands and laid them together, beneath his own, upon his breast.

"'Hours fly, flowers die'" (he quoted),

"'New men, new ways,
Pass by;
Love stays.'"

He lifted the hands he held to his lips. "Do you know the one thing that has come to me out of it all?"

"Yes," she murmured, "I know."

"It came to me in the night, last night. Up to then it had seemed fate's whipper-in that was driving

me. But then, when I saw the gulf opening at my feet, and saw no way out, and ceased to struggle, I knew all at once that fate is only an empty name; that it was — God."

He felt her fingers quiver in his clasp.

"There was an Eye that watched and a Hand that overruled," he said slowly. "Even the evil and the hatred — the temptation, the sin and the pain — the penalty — It overruled them all. Drink made the man who shot Craig a criminal — yet but for that burglary you might now be Craig's wife! Drink sent me to Craig's house that night — yet but for that journey I could not have saved you. Drink closed the prison door on me, but only there — I know it now! — could I have mastered it! And if I have won in this campaign and if I sit — with you, my darling! — in the Mansion on the Hill, it is because of what I learned within those walls — the knowledge of what drink has done to men!"

He released her hands and looked up into the heavens.

"It shall vanish from this state," he said. "And it shall vanish from this Union! I am as sure of it as if the sign of its passing were written there in the sky!"

She caught his arm. "See!" she said.

Far away, city-ward, over the trees, against the deep, dark vault, the dazzling, many-pointed blaze of a rocket paled and sank into the darkness.



